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Dedicated to the Conservation of Virginia's Wildlife and Related Natural Resources

This month, Virginia Wildlife *devotes all 34 of its pages—and then some—to features on hunting, a fall tradition deeply rooted in Virginia's history. We think there's something here for almost everyone, from cooking to camp safety. The hunter is among the most avid defenders of our wildlife resources, and his license fees have helped make Virginia wildlife what it is today. So this issue is for all of us, hunters and non-hunters alike, who cherish wildlife in Virginia.*

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Special Section
The brown pages are filled with valuable information for the outdoorsman: game harvest figures, the fall hunting outlook, a list of taxidermists, tips on camp safety, and more.

Cover

English Setter by Durant Ball, Newport News, Virginia

Back cover photograph by Robin Schroeder

Special Section

Editorial

It Takes More Than Skill

Dad must have worried a lot about me.

He grew up with a hard-nosed work ethic that was long on responsibility and mighty short on fun, while I grew up with the simple goal of doing as much hunting and fishing as possible. The two outlooks didn't seem to mix very well although I suppose Dad and I did agree on one point: that hunting and fishing meant avoiding work and responsibility.

Today, over forty years later, I know we were both wrong. To get the kind of hunting I prize the most means a lot of work and responsibility.

Dad and I both knew that the more responsibility people accept in their work and community, the more successful they're likely to be. But it was years before I realized the same thing is true of hunting. The responsible hunter is the the most successful, the most respected, and has the most fun. Look at it in terms of basic shooting skill, to begin with.

That kind of hunter does everything he can to shoot well. He abhors crippling game. In this day and age, though, no one can get enough shooting at actual game to become as skillful as possible. Getting to know your gun and ammunition and their limitations, and how to shoot safely and surely, means a lot of off-season work with bull's-eyes, clay birds, or just tin cans.

Just being a good shot isn't enough for the hunter who'd rather miss game than cripple and waste it. He must be in a good position to use his shooting skill. This means either getting within good shooting range of game, or drawing it within good shooting range. In the first case, the hunter learns to stalk, read game signs, and find how cover and the lay of the land relate to game movements. The second case means knowing how to lure game with decoys and game calls.

There's no surer sign of responsibility than using a trained hunting dog. A good bird dog puts the hunter in better shooting position on upland game birds, and a good retriever greatly reduces the loss of birds that are wounded or dropped in heavy cover. And can there be any doubt of a rabbit hunter's dedication if he supports a couple of little beagles? Accepting the responsibility of training and supporting a gun dog not only pays tangible dividends in more birds bagged, but deepens the whole enjoyment of hunting.

A strong sense of responsibility can go a long way in meeting the main problems of hunting today. Much of the game range we've made or saved during the past fifty years has been the doing of hunters—responsible hunters. They created and supported professional game management and research, fish and wildlife agencies, and fought the politics and economics that would have wrecked those efforts and devoured some of our best remaining gamelands.

Since a responsible hunter invests a lot of time and effort in what he does, he intends to get some returns on that investment. That means having good places to hunt. And because he is accountable for his actions, he doesn't steal his hunting places. He borrows them, with permission. This is partly a matter of ingrained respect for himself and the landowner, but like most of his other efforts it has a spinoff of increased enjoyment.

There's nothing new in the concept of hunter responsibility. Primitive hunters were often held accountable for their actions and lived with hunting taboos and responsibilities whose infractions were swiftly punished.

Among the Plains Indians, for example, buffalo hunting was often a carefully planned effort that depended on timing and cooperation. Punishment for violating the rules of a hunt could be severe: the hunter might be fined a horse or other equipment, beaten, or even exiled.

Dr. Doug Clarke, the Canadian biologist, was once shown an old Eskimo who had been blinded by his fellow hunters for being deliberately cruel while killing a caribou. Unnecessary cruelty was a fearful breach of responsibility, for it insulted the animal's spirit and jeopardized future hunting.

All this was far advanced before farming began about 10,000 years ago. Hunters had a keen sense of responsibility long before the first farmer ever broke ground. Since Dad wasn't a hunter, he never knew that. It wouldn't have made a lot of difference if he had. But he might have worried about me a little less—and I might have gotten out hunting a little more. □

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1981 Hunting Outlook

Last season Virginia's hunters scored another record deer harvest, despite several days of adverse hunting conditions in south central and north central Virginia. Prospects statewide are excellent for another banner year. Hunting may be particularly good where weather curtailed last year's harvest. Another record year is a possibility.

No change is anticipated in the bear harvest in 1981. The addition of Warren County will improve hunting prospects somewhat in northwest Virginia, but a harvest of approximately 200 animals is expected.

Coming off an excellent breeding season into a slightly longer fall hunting season over most of the state, the turkey flock is in excellent condition and should provide hunters with another banner year. The prospects for the fall turkey hunter could hardly be better.

Winter was relatively kind to Virginia's quail this year. With a few more birds carried over and a good, relatively dry spring, a good hatch is expected. Where adequate habitat is available hunters should experience a better season than last year.

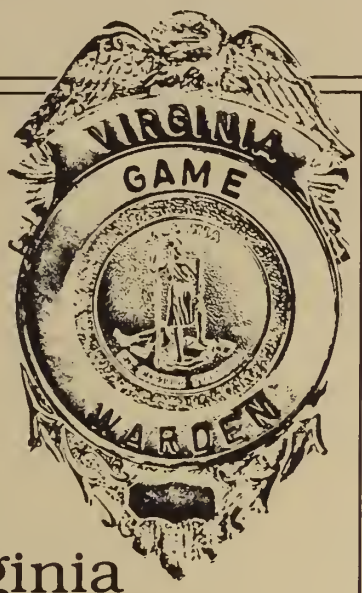
No change is expected in rabbit populations across the state. As always, rabbits will be scarce or plentiful locally, with very little evidence of a statewide trend. Clean farming methods and the clearing of hedgerows and other losses of rabbit habitat will continue to adversely affect rabbit hunting. The best prospects for rabbits in Virginia will continue to be in the western part of the state.

Last year's drought was not kind to squirrels and many wintered poorly where mast was scarce. Again, this is a local condition, with good mast production in some parts of the state and poor production elsewhere. Nevertheless, the total squirrel harvest may very well decline slightly this year.

Grouse are on the increase in most areas. The increase in the daily limit from two to three should result in a greater harvest with no adverse effect upon the population. □

Statewide Deer, Bear, and Turkey Harvest

County	1978 — 1979			1979 — 1980			1980 — 1981		
	Deer	Bear	Turkey	Deer	Bear	Turkey	Deer	Bear	Turkey
Accomack	229	0	0	213	0	0	296	0	0
Albemarle	1,384	18	72	1,178	12	214	1,298	22	286
Alleghany	888	8	328	955	8	232	850	9	327
Amelia	2,002	0	50	1,526	0	274	1,854	0	260
Amherst	727	7	59	887	4	197	973	10	197
Appomattox	794	0	53	788	0	328	792	0	245
Augusta	1,369	10	408	1,365	12	311	1,541	17	330
Bath	2,008	1	542	1,987	5	431	1,900	5	452
Bedford	919	10	49	1,242	4	138	1,478	3	243
Bland	749	9	157	690	7	118	601	8	196
Botetourt	1,362	6	480	1,295	23	292	1,199	13	371
Brunswick	1,246	0	23	1,109	0	127	1,059	0	155
Buchanan	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Buckingham	2,132	0	75	1,775	0	460	2,319	0	416
Campbell	272	0	29	288	0	147	315	0	165
Caroline	1,952	0	75	1,203	0	283	1,795	0	367
Carroll	129	0	0	129	0	0	175	0	0
Charles City	1,122	0	0	1,162	0	0	1,115	0	0
Charlotte	548	0	33	569	0	170	616	0	210
Chesapeake	479	5	0	422	1	0	396	3	0
Chesterfield	1,105	0	0	1,102	0	31	1,434	0	196
Clarke	253	0	34	277	0	24	232	0	28
Craig	1,140	3	207	1,044	3	190	1,049	10	216
Culpeper	419	0	15	498	0	100	614	0	90
Cumberland	1,466	0	51	1,257	0	261	1,589	0	258
Dickenson	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Dinwiddie	1,206	0	39	1,030	0	170	1,162	0	191
Essex	192	0	11	146	0	21	272	0	32
Fairfax	36	0	0	42	0	1	48	0	3
Fauquier	991	0	38	1,092	0	117	1,392	0	130
Floyd	140	0	0	233	0	0	188	0	0
Fluvanna	1,396	0	56	1,164	0	250	1,348	0	279
Franklin	407	0	0	500	0	30	555	0	25
Frederick	1,158	0	140	999	0	178	1,093	0	211
Giles	861	11	314	916	17	247	786	9	303
Gloucester	273	0	0	225	0	0	244	0	0
Goochland	936	0	16	888	0	149	991	0	187
Grayson	1,491	0	153	1,755	0	74	1,447	0	127
Greene	52	10	2	58	10	9	96	16	9
Greensville	1,045	0	0	553	0	1	601	0	2
Halifax	744	0	46	807	0	173	886	0	186
Hampton - Newport News(City)	205	0	0	214	0	0	281	0	0
Hanover	334	0	0	306	0	0	405	0	0
Henrico	448	0	0	340	0	0	423	0	0
Henry	59	0	0	85	0	0	113	0	0
Highland	1,239	4	293	1,245	6	207	1,201	4	242
Isle of Wight	921	0	0	856	0	0	1,103	0	0
James City	282	0	0	336	0	0	439	0	0
King & Queen	441	0	31	395	0	74	580	0	103
King George	479	0	0	505	0	0	595	0	0
King William	653	0	28	595	0	106	698	0	140
Lancaster	489	0	0	668	0	0	355	0	0
Lee	84	0	0	117	0	0	82	0	0
Loudoun	993	0	11	1,193	0	30	1,435	0	75
Louisa	1,088	0	42	888	0	208	990	0	222
Lunenburg	484	0	11	612	0	69	760	0	103
Madison	86	15	2	128	15	16	141	24	33
Mathews	66	0	0	66	0	0	80	0	0
Mecklenburg	410	0	0	530	0	0	514	0	0
Middlesex	90	0	0	109	0	0	102	0	0
Montgomery	162	1	124	272	3	117	242	3	153
Nelson	804	21	30	674	11	177	719	11	209
New Kent	1,146	0	0	1,060	0	0	1,142	0	0
Northampton	75	0	0	74	0	0	100	0	0
Northumberland	512	0	0	549	0	0	303	0	0
Nottoway	860	0	22	1,013	0	57	1,306	0	105
Orange	421	0	31	426	0	87	449	0	83
Page	520	10	72	452	13	84	426	9	77
Patrick	326	0	0	474	0	0	447	0	0
Pittsylvania	889	0	20	1,038	0	60	1,221	0	155
Powhatan	1,867	0	46	1,105	0	223	1,380	0	199
Prince Edward	819	0	37	834	0	200	1,112	0	173
Prince George	1,321	0	0	839	0	26	988	0	50
Prince William	324	0	15	454	0	74	419	0	58
Pulaski	422	0	76	333	2	90	284	0	88
Rappahannock	806	7	17	834	3	74	806	18	67
Richmond	577	0	0	638	0	0	483	0	0
Roanoke	99	0	30	99	0	34	136	0	58
Rockbridge	1,008	6	487	1,007	11	326	1,025	8	398
Rockingham	2,052	19	332	2,006	25	204	2,152	19	176
Russell	45	1	0	55	1	0	50	0	31
Scott	102	0	0	123	0	0	133	0	76
Shenandoah	1,744	9	230	1,740	5	360	1,733	5	308
Smyth	325	3	59	308	2	50	347	0	74
Southampton	3,093	0	0	3,252	0	0	3,330	0	0
Spotsylvania	485	0	12	561	0	65	619	0	61
Stafford	521	0	22	580	0	100	635	0	102
Suffolk	680	4	0	743	1	0	784	0	0
Surry	1,377	0	0	1,187	0	0	709	0	0
Sussex	1,834	0	0	1,766	0	0	2,000	0	0
Tazewell	105	2	39	116	4	29	146	3	63
Virginia Beach (City)	152	0	0	135	0	0	152	0	0
Warren	598	0	68	604	0	92	613	0	59
Washington	207	0	29	194	1	28	197	0	29
Westmoreland	224	0	0	236	0	0	250	0	0
Wise	60	0	0	79	0	0	90	0	97
Wythe	755	1	137	748	5	107	604	3	145
York	754	0	0	761	0	0	749	0	13
TOTALS	72,545	201	5,908	69,926	214	9,116	75,197	232	10,718



Virginia Wardens Crack Wildlife Marketing Ring

by Bob Gooch

Ten persons were arrested in Virginia during the past year as the result of an extensive undercover investigation by state game wardens. The investigation revealed an illegal game animal and bird marketing operation that had stretched into several states. Since the illegal marketing of game crossed state lines, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service was brought into the investigation.

The investigation turned up 18 violators charged with 42 violations of state law. The cases were tried in the counties of Augusta, Fairfax, Fauquier, King George, Madison, and Stafford.

The game, all taken north of the James River, was sold in the District of Columbia, Maryland, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, and West Virginia as well as Virginia.

Venison, or deer meat, was the major commodity in the illegal marketing operation, but bears, ducks, geese, and rabbits were also transported across state lines. In some cases muskrats, pheasants, quail, raccoons, and squirrels were also offered for sale, or sought by illegal merchants.

The illegal marketing operation was first detected in northern Virginia.

Virginia game wardens are trained regularly in undercover and intelligence-gathering operations. □

Sight-In And Sharpen Skills Before The Hunting Season

Good marksmanship is one of the hallmarks of the sportsman. It's also a very important part of what it means to be a responsible and ethical hunter.

The ethical hunter sharpens his skills during the off-season to ensure quick, clean kills when he takes to the field in the fall.

Preparing for the season should include more than taking a hunting rifle out of the closet, shining it up and buying a few boxes of ammunition.

It's important to make sure that guns are sighted-in properly before every hunt.

It's easiest to begin sighting-in a rifle with the target about 25 yards away. Using a rest, fire three shots and check the target for point of impact. The next step is to adjust the rear sight or scope to move the center of the shot group to the exact point of aim. Three shot groups and adjustments to the sights should be continued until the point of impact coincides with the point of aim.

Once the rifle is sighted-in at 25 yards, the target can be moved to a greater distance and the sights adjusted again. For most centerfire rifles, the recommended distance for this final sighting-in is about 200 yards.

It's important to remember that different bullet weights and different brands of ammunition have different points of impact so that sighting-in should always be done with the same ammunition that will be used on the hunt.

Good marksmanship is also a skill that has to be learned, and it takes practice.

There are a wide variety of shooting games that can provide hours of enjoyment as well as the opportunity to sharpen skills. From plinking to formal target and metallic silhouette shooting, there is an activity for every inclination.

According to a nationwide study conducted for the National Shooting Sports Foundation, much of the non-hunting public believe that today's hunter is generally not very skilled.

By sharpening their shooting skills and properly sighting-in before the season, hunters can help improve their public image. □

Comfort In Down Bags

by Bob Gooch

The hunter bound for a fall hunting camp in the Virginia mountains should be prepared for extremes in weather conditions. I find that I often pack clothing and bedding that I do not use, but frequently I encounter weather conditions that make those warm clothes and sleeping bags mighty welcome.

I recall vividly one November when I began a week's hunt under sunny skies and in 70-degree temperatures, but by the end of the week I was wading through several inches of snow and hunting in near-zero temperatures.

Because of these vagaries of the weather, I always pack my down sleeping bag, one that has a below-zero rating. It is light, comfortable in most weather, and easy to pack.

A problem with a down bag, however, is that when the temperatures are even modestly high, it can become uncomfortably warm. On occasion, I have even found myself sweating in my down bag.

I solved this problem by unzipping the bag and using it as a blanket in the custom of the old trail riders. Depending upon how warm it is I either roll up in it, or sleep between the folds. I am not sure whether this simply lets the body heat escape or permits the outside air to seep in. Possibly it is a combination of both, but except in extremely hot weather, down sleeping bags used in this manner can be very comfortable in unseasonable fall weather. □

1981-82 Game Laws Supplement

Migratory Game Bird Seasons

1981-82 VIRGINIA REGULATIONS

To be used as a supplement to SUMMARY OF VIRGINIA GAME LAWS, 1981-82 SEASON which contains additional information on license requirements, license fees and general regulations governing hunting in Virginia as well as open seasons and bag limits on non-migratory game birds, game animals and furbearing animals. For information on waterfowl, see separate digest A-12.

DOVES

SEASON: September 5 - October 24 -*Hunting permitted from 12 o'clock noon until sunset each day.*

December 19 - January 7 - *Hunting permitted from one-half hour before sunrise until sunset each day.*

BAG LIMIT: 12 per day, 24 in posession.

WOODCOCK

SEASON: November 9 - January 12.

BAG LIMIT: 5 per day, 10 in possession.

HOURS: from one-half hour before sunrise until sunset each day.

SNIPE:

SEASON: October 17 - January 31

BAG LIMIT: 8 per day, 16 in possession.

HOURS: From one-half hour before sunrise until sunset each day.

RAILS

SEASON: September 12 - November 20.

HOURS: From one-half hour before sunrise until sunset each day.

BAG LIMITS: A total of 15 clapper rails and king rails counted together a day, 30 in possession and 25 sora and Virginia rails, counted together a day, 25 in possession.

SPECIAL FALCONRY SEASON: DOVE, WOODCOCK, RAIL

SEASON: September 21 - December 7, December 19 - 31.

SNIPE:

SEASON: October 17 - January 31

BAG LIMIT (all falconry): 3 per day, 6 in possession.

HOURS (all falconry): From one-half hour before sunrise until sunset each day.

Duck and Goose Calling Contest

The second annual Virginia Duck and Goose calling competition will be held Saturday, September 19, 1981 during the sixth annual Mid-Atlantic Wildfowl Festival. Competition will be held for both senior men/women and juniors. Entry blanks may be obtained by mail from the Mid-Atlantic Waterfowl Festival, P.O. Box 651, Virginia Beach, Virginia 23451 or the Virginia Beach Pavilion on the morning of the competition. Winners of this statewide competition will have the opportunity to compete in the National Duck and Goose Calling Competition in Stuttgart, Arkansas later in the year.

Eliminations will be held at 1:00 P.M. Saturday to select three finalists for each category. Prior to the finals at 8:00 P.M., a demonstration of the art of duck calling will be presented by Pete Trexler of Loman Calls and Mr. W.J. "Blackie" Blackburn, a duck hunter residing in Virginia Beach. □

National Hunting & Fishing Day®

10th. Anniversary/Sept. 26,1981

Immutable Hunting Laws

1. A hunting partner usually oversleeps.
2. Hip boots leak only in cold water.
3. When matches are fewest, firewood is wettest.
4. For a drippy nose, a wool glove beats any bandana.
5. The first place to look for game is the last place you'd expect to find it.
6. In camp, the one who snores will fall asleep first.
7. If anyone gets sick during a hunt, it will be the cook.
8. If your stand is on the right fork of a trail and your partner's is on the left fork, all does will go up the right fork and all bucks will choose the left fork.
9. Fences are always 2" higher than your legs.
10. Only the man who builds farm gates can understand them.
11. It always takes longer to get there than to get back.
12. All trails have more uphill sections than they have downhill sections.
13. The last hills are the highest.
14. No matter which way you face on your stand, the game will always approach from behind.

Reprinted from The Big Sky Fred Bear Sports Club

Richard Simms, TWRA

Grouse On the Rapidan

On the Game Commission's Rapidan Wildlife Management Area, ruffed grouse are abundant: finding them is easy, but shooting them is a different story.

by Randall Shank

Marc Sudheimer

Cresting a mountain ridge, I gazed at an open area below that, from all indications, harbored grouse. A stream meandered through the forest clearing that was dotted with old apple trees and Game Commission-planted autumn olive. Wild grape vines clung to the remains of a chimney that protruded from the rubble of an abandoned mountain cabin.

Parker, my Brittany Spaniel, and I eased into the hollow. As Parker probed the hedgerows, I could sense the presence of a grouse, poised and ready to flush. However, a thorough investigation turned up no birds.

We walked up the creek bed and into the rhododendron-lined hollow at the head of the clearing. Not 15 yards into the ravine, a grouse flew up out of range and crested the hill above us. We immediately followed up the flush.

Parker cornered the partridge in a hickory windfall, but the bird escaped before I could manage a shot. Following the bird for a second time, we headed back down the hill and up the next ridge which was very steep. I was out of breath and my leg muscles ached. We reached the top of the mountain only to see the grouse fly straight up the next rise and over the next ridge.

We chased the grouse for a third time, heading for a tall white oak which I had used to mark the bird's flight path. After another hard hike, we reached the oak and discovered another thicket of autumn olive that was ideal grouse cover. It was on this third follow-up that we were finally rewarded for our efforts. Quartering closely in front of me, Parker began trailing a running grouse. Suddenly the flush came, and one shot ended the pursuit. A nice retrieve brought the fallen bird to hand.

After several follow-ups and hikes up and down mountain slopes, we had finally bagged that elusive mountain pheasant. The second bird and my limit for the day was

Richard Simms, TWRA

"Parker, my Brittany Spaniel, and I eased into the hollow. As Parker probed the hedgerows, I could sense the presence of a grouse, poised and ready to flush."

ridiculously easy. The abandoned mountain farmstead lay over the next crest and as I crossed it, I surprised a grouse basking in the warm afternoon sun. He was an easy shot as he flushed in front of me. In one shot, the day's hunt was over.

This enjoyable December outing took place within an easy drive of the majority of Virginia's population. Nestled on the eastern slopes of the Blue Ridge mountains in Madison and Greene counties, sits a mountain area encompassing nearly nine acres that is managed strictly for wildlife by the Virginia Commission of Game and Inland Fisheries. The Rapidan Wildlife Management Area surrounds the headwaters of the Rapidan and Conway rivers. The natural resource management program is designed to provide a habitat in which wildlife will flourish.

Because of its strategic location and the Commission's management program, wildlife abounds. Bear hunters have always flocked to these mountains in pursuit of their quarry. Deer, squirrel, turkey, and grouse are also plentiful. The reasons are simple. Rapidan WMA is bordered on the west and sometime surrounded by Shenandoah National Park. The park is a wildlife sanctuary: hunting is forbidden. As game populations reach above carrying capacity levels in the park, wildlife spills over into surrounding areas. Since the Rapidan area provides such a lush habitat, it is a natural drawing card for wild animals.

Abandoned apple orchards, hardwoods, and planted food patches provide the food sources and the cover that suits the needs of game. Mountain creeks and springs fill the need for water. The grouse that I had found liked the open areas the abandoned farmstead provided, and they were drawn to it.

For grouse hunters especially, Rapidan WMA is the nearest grouse hunting area east and northeast of Charlottesville. To find grouse on other public areas would mean a

drive to the Shenandoah Valley where hunting on national forest land is permitted.

The Rapidan WMA is made up of several separate tracts of land. Each has its own road access and borders either posted private land or Shenandoah National Park land. Hunters should honor these borders, not only because crossing them is illegal, but because ethical hunters are the most important ingredient in promoting their sport among non-hunters. In order to reach two of the larger tracts, take Route 630 off of Highway 29 near the town of Madison in Madison County. At Wolftown, bear right on Route 662 until you get to Graves Mill which is just a fork in the road. The right fork takes you into the park and then back into the wildlife area. The left fork winds up the mountain into a larger area that is managed by the Game Commission. Topographic maps of this hunting territory can be had by writing: the Potomac Appalachian Trail Club, 1718 N. Street N.W., Washington D.C. 20036. Request map #10 of the Central Section of Shenandoah National Park. Also, the Game Commission publishes a book featuring maps and descriptions of all its Wildlife Management Areas. To obtain one, send one dollar with your name and address to: WMA Map Book, Virginia Game Commission, P.O. Box 11104, Richmond, Virginia 23230.

Grouse hunting is a taxing sport with an elusive quarry. Finding a place to hunt that holds these ghosts of the forest can sometimes be as frustrating as trying to hit the bird once you've found him. The Rapidan WMA is the home of this mountain game bird. Hunt the mountains of the Rapidan and "old Ruff" may fill your game bag. □

Randall Shank lives in Aylett, Virginia. He is a frequent contributor to Virginia Wildlife; *his article on amateur bird dog field trials,* Tried and True, *appeared in the June 1981 issue.*

Leonard Lee Rue

The Aesthetics of Turkey Hunting

A son teaches his father what turkey hunting is all about.

by Kit Shaffer

Many years ago when my son was almost twelve years old, I was determined to make a skillful wild turkey hunter out of him. Every day when he wasn't in school, I would jolt him out of the sack early in the mornings, and walk him up and down the mountains until dark. When we flushed turkeys in the fall, I forced him to sit motionless in all types of weather waiting and hoping to call him up a turkey.

We both nearly froze numerous times while I attempted to teach him how much fun it was to hunt turkeys. I vividly recall many days in zero weather with snow on the ground, forcing my favorite child to freeze his fanny while his father desperately yelped in the turkey blind so that he might kill a turkey. During the springtime, wanting to brag about my son's big gobbler, we would get up even earlier and hunt harder. I couldn't understand, even as the boy grew older, why he obviously did not enjoy with enthusiasm my favorite form of outdoor recreation.

One day we were driving home from the mountains after still another discouraging day chasing turkeys. I apologized to the boy for not having assisted him in killing a big black bird.

I'll never forget his reply which eventually taught me more about the actual reasons for turkey hunting than I had previously learned throughout my lifetime.

"Dad, when will you ever realize that I don't have to kill a turkey in order to have a good time hunting? I had a wonderful time today just being with you and looking at all that beautiful scenery up there in those Blue Ridge Mountains." Out of the mouths of babes. . . . .

The definition of aesthetics describes it as "pertaining to beauty or beautiful." Now, in all my years of pursuing the wild turkey, I have honestly never observed a beautiful male wild turkey hunter. Most of them as a matter of record, have been some of the "ugliest hogs in the lot."

Some writers, more skilled than I, could doubtless write volumes about the beauty of the turkey itself and I will attempt to do this later. However, let's be completely candid about the subject.

When you make a critical examination of the individual parts of a turkey, they honestly aren't too appealing. I don't believe that there are many objects in nature any uglier than the head of a wild turkey. It is naked, snake-like, ends in a hard beak, and is covered with fine hair and an assortment of lumps, bumps and left-over appendages. The drab hens, well equipped for their mission in life, could hardly be described as beautiful (except, of course, to a sexy gobbler). By human standards, a female with a naked pinhead perched on an oversized body and supported by long, bony, scaly legs would not win any beauty contest!

In elaborating on the aesthetics of wild turkey hunting, I will not mention again the end product of every so-called successful hunt—the inevitable blood, guts and feathers. And if you really want to elaborate on ugliness, what is any more distateful than the spongy, bloody breast of an adult spring gobbler? This is certainly not my favorite part of the thrill of hunting America's largest game bird!

Whenever we attempt to analyze why wild turkey hunting is such an appealing sport, we would, of necessity, have to consider where and when it is carried out!

In Virginia, we are fortunate in having some of the most magnificent mountain scenery, especially during the fall, winter and spring months. Thus, when we consider turkey hunting in the autumn, we naturally think about colored leaves, crisp morning temperatures and invigorating climbs

into the Blue Ridge or Appalachian Mountains. Usually, most of the lovely leaves have already fallen by the time turkey season arrives, so autumn hunting in our state is stalking through fallen leaves up and down the ridges and mountains. It is hunting through the oaks, beech, dogwoods and grape thickets searching for the characteristic scratchings,tracks and droppings that are a dead giveaway to an experienced hunter.

The trees, mountains, streams, waterfalls, and at times, patches of snow are a wonderful part of hunting the big black birds in the fall and winter. Take away this emotional experience, and you emasculate the real, lasting soul of the hunt.

It's the mountain cabin with a roaring fire of oak and hickory; the fellowship of delightful companions; and on occasion, a huge gobbler hanging from the rafters of the back porch. This is turkey hunting at its best!

In reality, the aesthetics or beauty of the wild turkey is typified by the proud grandeur of an adult gobbler during springtime. What other living creature is more magnificent or exciting than a puffed up, fanned out gobbler in full strut? At a distance, he appears to be all black, but at closer range in full sunlight, the feathers are a delightful blend of greens, purple, browns, blacks and tans. The gobbler head appears to change rapidly from white to red to blue, perhaps depending on his moods. His trophy beard is always the focal point of a turkey hunter's attention.

A graceful wild turkey in flight is a marvelous sight to observe. Every turkey hunter will attest to the fact that turkeys are adept at becoming airborne and rapidly flying out of gun range. The velocity of their flight, whether flapping with huge wings or soaring with set wings off the top of mountain, is always an awesome demonstration.

I can't seem to make up my mind whether I prefer hunting turkeys in the springtime or in the fall-winter season. It's somewhat like making that tough choice between a blond or a red head. I personally like them both!

Spring gobbler hunting has a special charm and appeal of its own, for several reasons. Not only are we hunting the largest and most thrilling of our upland game birds, but the associated warming weather and nature's emergence at this season of the year usually produce a most delightful experience.

So what's the big deal or appeal? What is there about spring gobbler hunting that motivates normally intelligent individuals to get out of a warm bed in the middle of the night? What is this strange mania that drives gobbler hunters temporarily away from their families and jobs? Some turkey hunters undoubtedly sacrifice themselves in order to harvest their season's limit or to be able to boast about their 22-pound bird. We all know that a wild turkey is just as delicious as a domestic variety. However, I'm certain that many are driven by an inward urge or need for a most unique, exciting experience.

We have just lived through about six months of cold temperatures, bare trees, ice, snow, mud and drabness in the out-of-doors. Suddenly and dramatically, the sap begins to rise! Dogwoods, redbuds, forsythia and other trees and shrubs start blooming. The grass takes on a greenish tinge. All birds start singing and thinking about nesting. After seemingly endless months of waiting, the spring gobbler season has arrived and we turkey hunters become an integral part of nature's awakening.

There is surely no more thrilling, appealing and almost reverent time of the year than at 4:30 A.M. on an April or May morning. Let's review a typical day.

It's still dark, though you arose around 3:00 A.M. and drove furiously, without breakfast, to be on your favorite ridge by day-break. It's plenty chilly, your gun is loaded and you are nervously accumulating all the necessary callers and camouflage equipment. The excitement is terrific! Will the old boys gobble this morning? How many other hunters will be out here this morning competing for old granddad? Will I be able to call up the gobbler or will I goof up with my call or my questionable shooting ability? All these thoughts and more rush through your mind as the darkness persists.

Suddenly, over on the ridge, a whip-poor-will thrills its excited, monotonous call. Occasionally a great horned owl may mournfully answer. Another bird calls, then other species awakens to a new day. One by one, all of nature's birds and insects join in a delightful symphony of sound. The cardinals, thrushes, wrens, bob-whites and doves, all lend their voices to the music. Frequently in our mountain habitat, a grouse drums further up on the ridges. One of the last to open up is the beloved crow. Squirrels appear from all directions, scurrying through the leaves and sounding somewhat like approaching turkeys. Gradually everything gets a little lighter and brighter. The trees, shrubs, and spring flowers appear out of the darkness. Talk about aesthetics—the sounds, the sights and even the fresh fragrance of springtime all blend together into a beautiful three-dimensional extravaganza.

Everything is now complete except for one important detail! Where are the gobblers? Why haven't they opened up? You panic: why didn't I go someplace else this morning? Did someone kill that old boy yesterday?

Suddenly, out of the rhapsody of music thunders that most thrilling of all sexual calls: gobble-gobble-gobble. It's almost anti-climactic at this stage. I have great compassion for those unfortunate souls who live in places without wild turkeys. They have missed a thrilling experience.

Although each experience of calling in an adult gobbler is different, every spring turkey hunter knows what happens next: the sudden breaking of a twig in back of you, the slow, maddening thump-thump that comes from a strutting, approaching gobbler and from your own frantically racing, pounding heart. . .each experience may be different, but it is always breathtaking, always thrilling.

Then, you spot it: the biggest darn game bird in the world and it's moving toward your hiding place!

Why can't I keep this old double barrel from jumping up and down? It weighs a ton! Fleas and mosquitoes are in my eyes, ears and throat! How can I get off another yelp without the gobbler seeing me? Suddenly, he is thirty feet away! All you need to do is *shoot* that huge target. . .if only your strained and drained body could. As you frantically raise your gun and aim at the patriotic, red, white and blue head (with a tremendous beard, of course!), you realize that bagging or missing the gobbler is really immaterial. You have already experienced outdoor recreation at its very finest!

The aesthetic appeal of wild turkey hunting stems from its ability to satisfy our needs for the total experience—challenge, anticipation, test of skills, anxiety and success in an environment that produces the right stimuli to all the senses. Turkey hunting is no substitute for anything. Aesthetically, it's the real thing! □

Kit Shaffer is a veteran of the Game Commision's game division with over 32 years of service. He retired as game management field coordinator in December 1979. He lives in Lynchburg.

Opening day of deer season is more than a date on the calendar: it is the culmination of weeks of working, scouting and planning, all for that one day, that one moment...

It's All Part of the HUNT

by Gerald Almy

John Ebeling

"To the sportsman, the death of the game is not what interests him; that is not his purpose. What interests him is everything he had to do to achieve that death—that is, the hunt. . .one does not hunt in order to kill; on the contrary, one kills in order to have hunted."

Jose Ortega y Gasset, the Spanish philosopher, from his Meditations on Hunting.

The date: November 17, 1980. Opening day of Virginia's deer season; third Monday in November. A day that, traditionally, is the single most exciting, intensely-lived of all 365 days of the year in the lives of tens of thousands of Virginians.

Like most of my fellow deer hunters, I came through Sunday night, November 16, quite a bit worse for the wear. Part of the long, long night is spent dreaming of broad, sweeping racks perched atop massive, elk-sized deer. Many minutes more are devoted to worrying whether all the gear and food have been organized properly and packed, so that it will last me, if necessary, through a long 11-hour day of waiting and watching for bucks. Most of the night, though, is spent longing futilely for sleep to overtake me, so I will feel rested for the demanding watch for whitetails soon to ensue. But sleep does not come. Oh, there is an hour or two of fitful slumber—a poor excuse for sleep that will have to do. But mostly the night is spent churning with emotions, longings, anticipation. Easily five times the alarm clock is checked, to

make sure the button is pulled out, so this most important day of the year will not see me oversleeping.

At last, the ludicrous hour of 3:30 a.m. arrives.

Get up.

Leaping out of bed, I don longjohns, fix a breakfast of oatmeal, juice and coffee, then add the extra layers of cloth ing I will need to ward off the cold on my vigil for a buck.

There are deer nearby that occasionally walk through my yard, but today, opening day, I will hunt my most productive spot for a buck. It is a difficult-to-reach mountaintop in Fauquier County which a gracious landowner has given me permission to hunt.

An hour before first light, I pull off the gravel road and peer up at the thickening gray clouds racing south across the dark night sky. Downing the final dregs of coffee remaining in the gray mug, I lock the pickup and begin the ascent. There is no trail nor road through this second-growth timber and brush. The forest is much too dense, the terrain too steep to drive on.

Flashlight in hand, I plod slowly, steadily uphill. The first section is the worst. One must pick, roll, stumble and claw his way through tangles of greenbrier and honeysuckle and grapevines. They scratch at the face, tear at the clothing and pull the hat from its perch more times than I care to admit.

The air, which didn't seem too bad when I first stuck my head out of the house, suddenly has a nasty, cold bite to it. Halfway up the mountainside, I am perspiring. Alternately I am chilled from the cold and flushed with the heat of the

climb. The legs are like noodles now, weakening strained with pain. But to ease up now would put me on my stand after first light. I plunge onward.

At last, an hour after I left the truck, the steep mountain slope becomes gentler. The crest is near.

I slow my pace now, try to relax and cool down as I pick my way through the brush toward the stand. But dense clouds blot out all heavenly illumination. For a moment, I am unsure where my chosen oak tree lies—lost on a cold, dark mountaintop just before dawn.

Finally, as I stumble about, the vaguest hint of daylight begins to bring form to the woods: dark, gray space, punctuated by the sentinel black forms of trees. Gray and black, that is all. But it is enough now to regain my bearings, locate the fat oak tree on the mountain shelf. Quickly I shimmy up, raise my gear on a rope and lean back against the trunk of the massive hardwood.

For a brief, fleeting second, I close my eyes and relax. The first hurdle has been cleared. Days of hard, thorough scouting have been accomplished; gear has been prepared; rifle sighted in meticulously; permission to hunt on the land reconfirmed; and finally, I have arisen long before dawn and completed the grueling uphill climb to my chosen stand.

It is all part of the hunt, I reflect from my perch on the oak limb atop the Blue Ridge Mountains. All the work, the study, the scouting, the preparation, and the hard physical effort often required to get to the spot where you hope to encounter a buck whitetail that is unaware of your presence. All dues to pay, effort to expend toward the goal of bagging a deer.

And so is the pain that now seeps through my body on the mountain ridge. Pain in the legs from the 2,000-foot climb. Numbness and aching in the fingers, the toes, the face, from the bite of the cold. It is all part of the hunt. And as strongly as I long for comfort, for warmth, for relief for weary legs, I know that this pain of the hunt is good. It is how I earn the right to take the life of the majestic buck deer. It makes me feel my very existence on a basic, physical level.

The desire to find relief from stiffening muscles comes immediately, and the battle of will begins. It is not to impress any one person that I remain on this stand. I hunt alone. I challenge myself only. Myself and the deer. By feeling the pain of cold, of fatigue, of loss of sleep, of aching muscles, of immobility, I fathom the stark, yet beautiful world of the whitetail. By arising hours before first light, I enter his world of pre-dawn ramblings. By climbing up the steep mountainside, I tred the craggy, forbidding terrain he calls home.

To take the life of the buck, I humble myself. I cast off the coddling amenities of civilization and reenter his natural world.

True, I could see the buck on a country drive at dusk, perhaps, if I were lucky. I could photograph him in a park. But only by hunting him, entering the cycle of life-and-death, predator-and-prey, that governs all wild creatures, do I become *a part* of his world. I join him when I affirm, by hunting, that his death is good and vital to the continued cycle of life and death and rebirth. Without death, the life of the deer I seek would be meaningless. Without death, so would mine. My mortality is mirrored to me in the eyes of the buck.

The cold soon revives me from these drifting reveries. I am brought back to a gray woods carpeted with dry, brown leaves. It is a woods that is now taking on a sharp, clearly-defined form as a drab dawn overtakes the Blue Ridge.

Down the hillside, to my left, I hear a faint shuffling of leaves. The leaden skies make the light so dim I can barely make out the form of a deer walking through the woods. The 7x binoculars gather light, and I see spike antlers on the deer. The animal is rather small, though, and moving hurriedly. I decide to forego this early chance. The light is still dim, and shooting would be risky, even though legal hunting time has arrived.

The cold is worse now, and the chill from perspiring on the mountain climb bites deeper, seeming to penetrate the bones. Shots from distant mountainsides and valleys pierce the thick morning air from afar, but close by, I hear no crack of firearms.

A half-hour later, deer again intrude on my consciousness, bringing a shudder of delight as their woods-gray forms slink into view. They are does, a pair of them. A mother and a single fawn. I watch, enthralled, a slight smile tracing across my wind-chapped lips.

They creep noiselessly through the brittle leaves before disappearing down the side of the knoll. No buck follows.

It is 9 a.m. now. I have been up 5½ hours, scanning the woods in frozen immobility for half that time. Have I erred in passing up the small spike at first light? Doubts race through my mind, mingling with the pain of the cold and aching muscles. I long for another buck to slip into view.

And there, suddenly, he appears. Straight above me, easing down the ridge. It is a male deer. Even before I see antlers the intuition of years of deer hunting tells me the whitetail's gender. He is alone, walking with the hunch-backed stealth only bucks display.

But there is also an impeccable grace to his movements. Slowly he eases three steps, stops, scans the woods, munches on a tender branch tip.

With the slowness of a cat crouching toward prey, I cautiously ease the Remington 700 to my shoulder. It is a fluid motion that I have learned from years of practice and several too-fast attempts that scared bucks and spoiled shots in the past.

Finally, the bolt-action rifle is at my shoulder; the variable scope is before my eyes. The dull November light is brightened by the optics. The 4x setting magnifies a beautiful three-point buck deer easing toward me. It is not a trophy, but the body size of the whitetail is above average. And the shot is a clear one through the sparse brush on the mountaintop.

I ease the safety off and all the countless hours of study, scouting and preparation, all the sweat, aching muscles and exhausting effort seem to well up inside me into a single, awesome feeling of being alive, to the fullest. The culmination of deer hunting is so rich because of the immense challenge and sacrifice required to succeed.

The buck is mine. I know it now, as I fight off the fever that trembles inside me, ease the safety forward, aim behind the shoulder and squeeze off the 150-grain bullet.

The deer buckles, settles to the ground without moving a step. I am a mixture of sadness and elation. But the sadness, I know, is false, and weak. Trembling, I climb down the oak, walk over to the buck and sit for a moment, admiring his beauty and trying to calm my racing nerves.

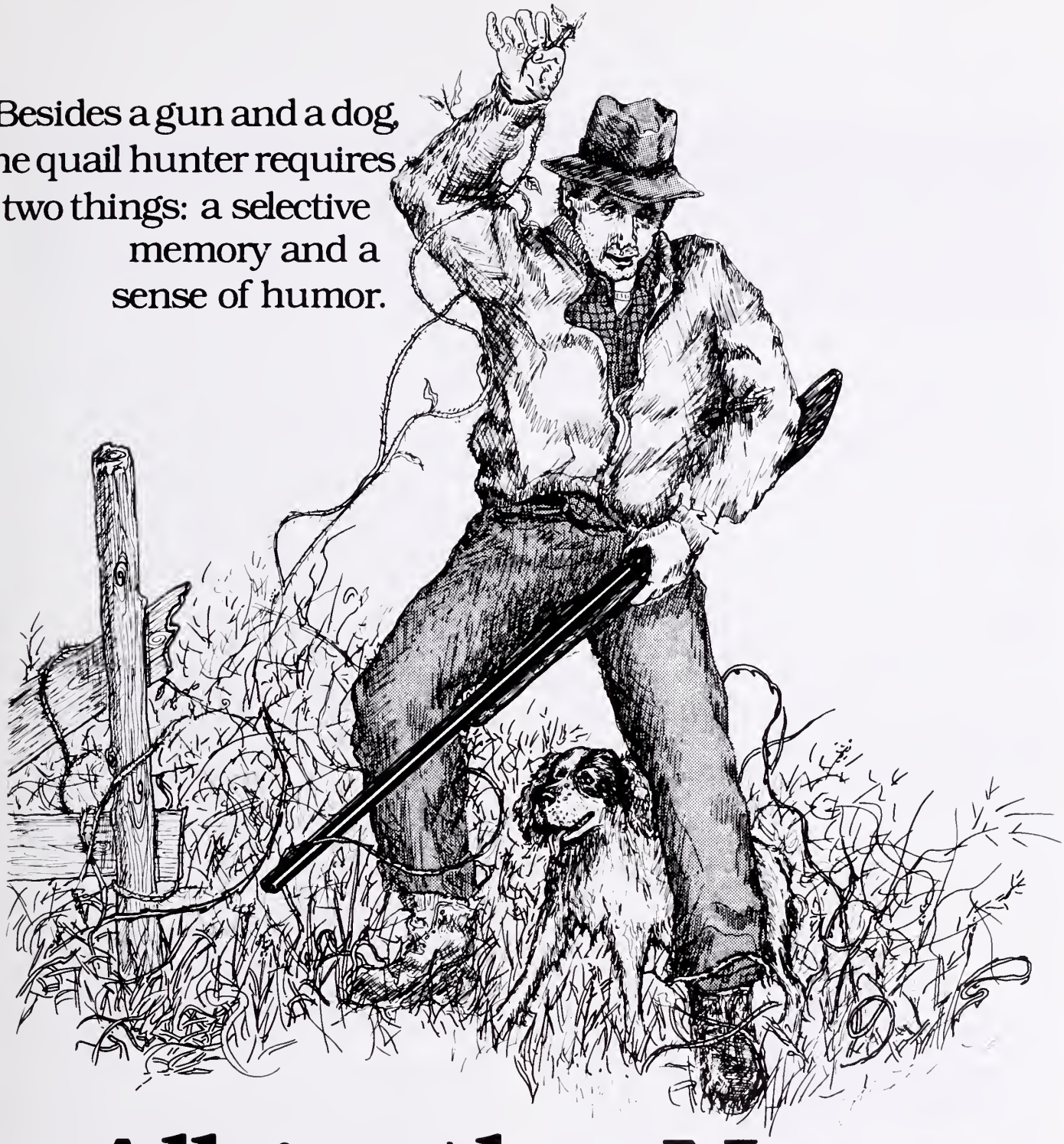
Soon enough, I shake myself back into the practical world and field dress the plump buck. That task accomplished, I tie a drag rope around his antlers and begin the slow, long haul down the mountain slope.

So far, the clouds have held off, but suddenly they unleash their pent-up precipitation with a vengeance. Starting as a cold rain, the moisture soon changes to sleet, then sharp ice particles mixed with snow and slush.

It is nearly lunchtime when the buck and I arrive at the base of the mountain. Straining, I hoist the deer into the pickup bed and head for nearest checking station. □

Gerald Almy is a regular contributor to Virginia Wildlife, *and other such well-known publications as* Field and Stream *and* Southern Outdoors. *He lives in Woodstock, Virginia.*

Besides a gun and a dog, the quail hunter requires two things: a selective memory and a sense of humor.



All in the Name of Quail

by Joel Vance

See the fellow over there, the one down on his knees, his expression that of someone who has just gotten his upper lip caught in a cornsheller?

See how he moans in anguish, rubs at his knotted thighs and tangled calves? Can you guess why he suffers the torments of the damned?

Look at the ratty old shell vest. See the dog whistle hanging around his neck like a dead albatross. Regard the double-barrel L.C. Smith. And, finally, peer off into the distance where a pointer with a skull the approximate thickness of the Roanoke Yellow Pages is just vanishing over yon hill.

Quite obviously this agonized individual is, simply enough, a quail hunter at the end of a normal day in the field.

His legs have revolted (not only have they revolted, but they're revolting to look at, too). Muscles too long tormented have rebelled. So, is this Job of the Jillikins going to repent, go home, take up tatting samplers that say "Home, Sweet Home" and "Goat Ropers Need Love, Too"?

Naah! He's a quail hunter, remember? He'll go out and do it again tomorrow. He'll have another fine day exercising his yell glands, practicing hoarse screaming while his dog, the one that costs him enough to finance crime in Los Angeles for a year, demonstrates for his hunting buddies every canine misdeed ever invented. He'll miss shots that an escapee from the Home for the Terminally Inept could make with his eyes shut. He'll trudge 14 miles, all uphill. He'll pirouette through briar thickets that will make his tender skin look like a street map of downtown Richmond. All in the name of Bird. For something that weighs eight ounces on a good day, a whole lot of energy goes up in sweat, muscular ache and foul language.

Bobwhite quail are the most important of the later-season upland game birds in the 37 states and two provinces where they are legal game. Only doves are more often taken (about 50 million, compared to 35 million bobwhites).

"What is there about this little chicken that makes otherwise sober industrious citizens act as if their brains got tore?"

Compare that to 2.2 million valley quail or 1.3 million desert quail or 3.6 million blue quail. The national kill of ruffed grouse, the most glamorous of the upland birds, is less than three million. Add every gallinaceous game bird harvest together and it still totals only one-third of the annual bobwhite quail bag.

Why? What is there about this little chicken that makes otherwise sober, industrious citizens act as if their brains had got tore?

I looked inward for the answer to this ponderous question, down where the inner man shuffles around peering nearsightedly at the world. I remembered back. . .

I wake in the unheated attic bedroom of the old farmhouse, our hunting shack, under the weight of enough quilts to insulate the Klondike. It's still dark and the tip of my nose prickles where it's exposed. Gonna be a cold one.

Somebody's grandmother, in an oval frame, sepia-toned by a century of life on the wall, glares down at me from across the room. Why do our ancestors always look so grim in old photographs? If they didn't ever have any fun, how did we get here?

The night before, I kicked off my clothing, not wasting time, for the icy cold grabbed me instantly in a gelid clutch. Now my clothing gets its revenge for my having made it sleep on the floor. It is like dressing in hoar frost.

Breakfast is burbling on the stove downstairs and the vibrant fragrance of coffee rolls up the stairwell.

Out in what once was a smokehouse there is a dog who, until a couple of nights before, was the basic fireside pet, plump with the suet of inactivity, wheezing flaccidly and twitching amid dreams of his former glories. Now, suddenly, shockingly, he's dumped in a prickery bed of old, cold straw with a couple of smelly strangers, shivering in the frosty night and listening to distant coons squall. It's no life for man nor Brittany alike.

He comes out of the smokehouse stiffly, his amber eyes darkened with accusation, suspecting that I spent a warm, comfortable night inside the farmhouse. But bird dogs are uncomplicated creatures, simple tools not far advanced from the rock. They are the hammer of dogdom. Where a blind person's lead dog is as complex as a sophisticated computer, the bird dog exists for one thing—finding game birds.

Bird dogs have run a pulled thread through the smooth fabric of my life, all the way back to Pat, a feathery-tailed, lovely English setter taken by my father as payment on a debt. My Dad thought he had made a good deal, but he was wrong, for Pat had a stone nose and a brain to match.

I once had a bet that my bird dog was infinitely better than the dog owned by an outdoor writing friend of mine. We carried on this friendly vendetta in the public press, so a lot of people knew about it and waited eagerly to see who

would triumph. Oh, how I flayed him, in person and in print! His dog, I opined, was the inspiration for Jack Clement's tender ballad, "That Dirty Old Egg-Sucking Hound." And so it went, me heaping insult upon calumny.

So we finally hunted together. . .and my dog ate three of his quail.

Here is my bird dog now, Chip. He is of the Brittany persuasion and is descended from the elders of the bird dog tribe, for spaniels were pointing birds before the first pointer or setter ever hove on the scene to eat his master's lunch or pee on the boss's hunting coat.

My breath hangs in the still morning air and I stretch luxuriously, hearing the faint popping of my abused skeletal structure. Off in the bottoms a quail whistles reveille. Time for all of us to get together, them hunched in the fencerow in a nervous bevy, us lolloping down the row on either side, stumbling over clods, stepping chuckholes. It's an ancient game we play and the stakes are somewhat higher for the quail.

But before we sally forth into the frost-rimmed fields, we have to fuel up with the day's first massive dose of cholesterol. Animal fat is the constant companion of the quail hunter. Think about it. Every hunter starts the day with a rasher of half-cooked bacon, several rich yellow eggs so shiny with drippings they shoot down your gullet like a ferret down a rathole.

Then, lunch will be salami flecked with fat and, chances are, supper will be some fried atrocity that will trigger gut rumbles and percussive indigestion that will make the old hunting shack sound like the fire-for-effect zone of an artillery barrage. At least that's the way it will be if you hang around, as I do, with guys who cook the way old people run the intermediate hurdles.

The dogs, now that they've shaken out the night kinks, are all sprint and squat, eternal optimists. Who ever heard of a bird dog husbanding his energy? By nightfall, they'll be pad-weary, burr-stung, shadows of their dawn enthusiasm.

But I'm just as bad on the first morning of a new hunt. All the somber memories of the preceeding season have faded and I look forward to golden days, abundant energy, plenty of shooting, plenty of hitting. Why can I never summon up, like Bael or some other loathsome devil, the memory of the day when sleet ate at my face and my legs turned to noodles. The day I couldn't have hit a quail with its head stuck down the barrel of my gun. The day the only bird we saw flying was a vulture.

We start into the quail jungles. You realize that when God was creating the world, He passed out the brains, realized He had none left for his next bit of artistry, said, "Oh, well, I'll create a quail hunter anyway." So he did and, for good measure, created a pointer to go with him. He looked at this brainless pair standing before Him and realized they needed some habitat.

So He created the bramble.

"Bramble" is a generic term that covers an array of plant life armed with weapons fearsome enough to bring a Cape buffalo whimpering to its knees. Wild rose, blackberry, cat briar, plum, locust—the names march on like the dread recitation of one's past sins on the Day of Judgement. And the punishment is just as severe as eternal damnation. I almost always come home from a quail hunt with skin that looks as if I've been waltzing with bobcats.

There was a time, so they tell me, when the bobwhite quail lurked at the edge of these fearsome thickets, only occasionally venturing into those spikey profusions. That time must have been about the same time Pocahontas was saying to John Smith, "I'd like to make pemmican with you, Big Fella."

Nowadays the quail I occasionally meet over the bead of my old L.C. Smith are born and bred in the briar patch. Hunting them is like being a field tester for barbed wire. My hunting pants often hide under the bed the day after being abused by the countryside. I've tried hiding there myself, but Foster or one of the other masochists I hunt with always comes along, drags me out, and says, "Come on. If we gotta go, you gotta go too."

Our guns are burnished by passage through that stiletto shrubbery. The muzzles of our old guns are silvered by vegetative buffing and there's the glisten of rubbed metal around the receivers where we hold them. The stock wood is finely figured, but there are scratches and gouges as well, for these are used guns, not collector's pieces. When the covey goes up, the guns bark at them with the authority of their many years and sometimes the quail listen.

Dogs and quail and old pards. . .

Maybe there are days when the miles back to the car are far longer than those going in. Maybe sometimes the best part of the day has been a baloney sandwich that under any other circumstances would gag a junkyard goat. Maybe there are times when too many miles and not enough resiliance causes me to walk like Groucho Marx. Maybe there are times when I can't shoot my way out of a fertilizer sack with a case of field loads. Maybe there are times when we get up seven coveys and everyone limits out except me because I never once was in position to shoot. Maybe there are times when my dog's brains turn to fungus and he couldn't point a roast beef sandwich in the middle of a snooker table. Maybe. . .

But what does it matter. There's always tomorrow and the dog you trained from spraddly puppy-hood lays into a point so taut you couldn't move him with a D-7 Caterpillar and the covey comes up and you take one neatly on the left, then swing smoothly to the right and dump a second, and the dog retrieves them both with out ruffling a feather.

And your old hunting pard scratches at his chinstubble where he didn't shave that morning and growls admiringly, "Nice double, by golly!"

Isn't quail hunting always like that? □

Joel Vance works for the Missouri Department of Conservation. In addition to writing for Missouri Conservationist, *he regularly contributes to many well-known magazines.*

Dawn in the Autumn Hardwoods

No outdoorsman appreciates the golden dawn more than the squirrel hunter

by Bob Gooch

Dawn in the autumn hardwoods may well be nature's most inspiring spectacle, one no outdoorsman is more appreciative of than the squirrel hunter.

The dawn at any season is full of promise. A new day is born, one full of hope and new opportunities. Dawn kicks off another day for the hunter, hours before the flip of a calendar page does so in homes and offices across the land. It breeds golden days in the fall, days bright and crisp that produce their own moments of history and then are gone forever.

The world is fresh at dawn, clear and cool or cold depending upon the season. Those who arise to greet it get a jump on their fellowman-in inspiration as well as time.

Dawns are one of the joys of squirrel hunting, and even when he does not bag a bushytail, the squirrel hunter is a better person for having made the effort.

But there is more than beauty in the dawn.

The squirrel hunter knows many dawns, the flaming red ones that shoot crimson streaks into the sky and warn the hunter that all is not well with the weather. If he does not score today, the chances are good that tomorrow's dawn will be too stormy to hunt. And then there are the pale ones, the ones that break faintly in the east to light a cloudless sky. They grow slowly, but eventually send golden sunbeams slanting through the hardwoods. They promise fair weather and tomorrow's opportunity.

In between are the pink ones, the faint rosy dawns, unreliable weather forecasters that create a guessing game for the squirrel hunter. They tell him little. But they too create an inspiring setting for the hunter. And if he bags a bushytail or two, he is doubly rewarded.

Finally there are the stormy dawns when gray clouds scud across the heavens to obscure the artistic work of the early sun. Like the faintly pink ones, they tell the hunter little. Often the air is damp and heavy with moisture that may break into rain momentarily. The day that follows will likely be as gray as the dawn.

The hunter who gropes through the pitch black of night to reach his stand before dawn is in for a treat as the new day breaks on the eastern horizon.

Often the raspy call of a crow is the first sound to break the still of the night, or sometimes the eerie hoot of an owl on a final prowl before holing up for the day.

But the frisky gray squirrel is also an early riser. It darts suddenly from its den high in an ancient oak to scamper along swaying tree limbs en route to an early breakfast. A squirrel racing to breakfast can be a real challenge to the rifleman or bowhunter—and even the scattergun fan will find the shooting tricky.

Songbirds follow the crows, the hoot owls, and the busy bushytails—and suddenly the woods are alive with life. The hunter can become so absorbed in the drama around him that he may neglect his hunting—until suddenly a frisky squirrel presents him with a target.

In spite of the stormy weather they portend, I like those flaming dawns, the ones that come up fast to form a scarlet back-drop for the golds and reds of the autumn woods—and it is not just for aesthetic reasons. While they create a wild spectacle of nature few artists can capture completely, they fade almost as suddenly as they are formed. Once the sun escapes the horizon they are gone.

But those crimson dawns are also a prime time to be in the squirrel woods. Possibly the squirrel reads the weather from them as does the hunter, but more likely it possesses some other sixth sense—some other mystery of nature. In any event the squirrel can predict stormy weather with an uncanny degree of accuracy. The little animals feed actively before a storm, and it is a prime time to be in the squirrel woods.

For the same reason those damp, gray ones are also good.

But just about any kind of dawn short of a downpour of rain is productive for squirrels. The crack hunter in good territory will seldom experience difficulty bagging his Virginia limit of six.

Those early risers scooting from a den make a tough target. It is not the best place to bag a limit of autumn squirrels, however. Den trees are good later when the woods are bare of nuts, but for early autumn nothing can approach a golden hickory tree laden with its rich fruit. A stand near such a tree can produce some fast autumn action.

The hunter who attempts to locate such a tree in the poor light of dawn is making a mistake. The best squirrel hunting requires a bit of scouting—at least enough to locate a hickory the squirrels are feeding in. Nut fragments beneath the tree is his clue. He should also plan his route to the tree and pick out a good stand, one he will be comfortable on.

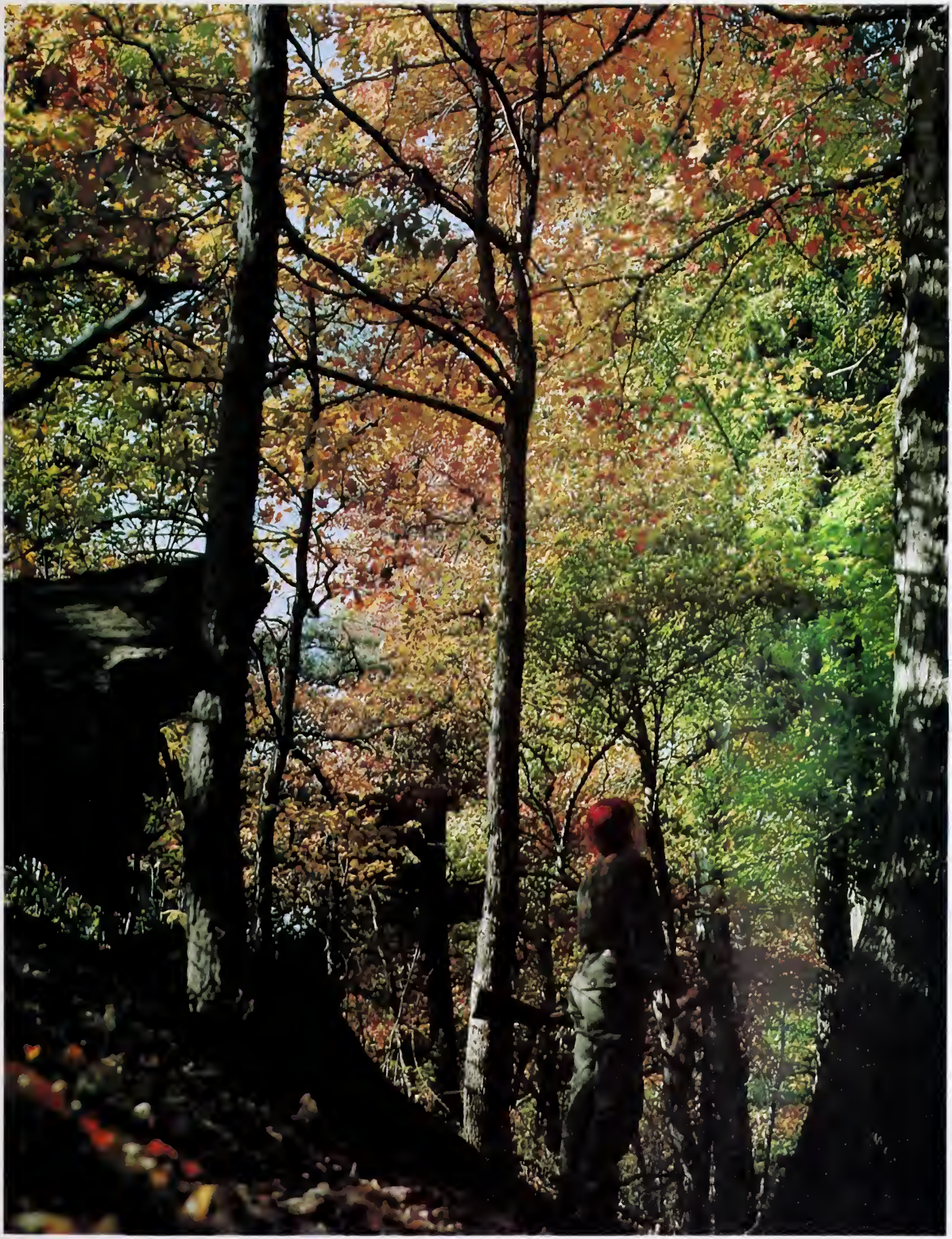
My choice for autumn squirrel hunting is the little .22 caliber rifle. It is highly accurate, packs plenty of killing power, and its mild report does not shatter the still of the morning as does the shotgun. (The bow and arrow is even quieter, but I never seem to develop enough shooting skill to score consistently on squirrels.)

Bushytail is rarely frightened by the crack of the little rimfire rifle. If you miss your first shot it will usually just perk up its ears, listen and then go back to cracking nuts. I have downed many squirrels with my second shot. An old hunter taught me this: when you drop a bushytail with a well-placed shot, mark it down and let it lay. Leaving your stand to retrieve it is more disturbing to the tranquility of the woods than is the echo of the light rifle.

The camouflage dress of the bowhunter or the spring turkey hunter is a good choice for the autumn squirrel hunter, and it makes little difference whether the brown of the green shades predominate. Brown fades against the dead leaves on the forest floor, but there is still enough green in the woods to make the green inconspicuous.

A limit can come quickly at daybreak, and when you collect your game from beneath the golden hickory tree there may still be traces of dawn as you leave those autumn woods. □

Bob Gooch, one of Virginia's best-known outdoor writers, lives in Troy. He is a regular contributor to Virginia Wildlife as well as other magazines and newspapers.



Partners Afield

Teaching your wife to shoot can be fun for her and for you, and you'll have a rare prize: a good hunting partner.

by Paul Rundell

Out of the corner of my eye I saw the muzzles of the over-under swinging, tracking the bird as it struggled for altitude. The flat clap of the 20 gauge broke the stillness of the autumn afternoon and the bird exploded—in a shower of black dust.

"I hit it, I hit it," my wife yelped. "Did you see that?"

I tried to remain stern when confronted with this elation of early success. Fighting back my own broad grin, I reminded her to concentrate and do what she did the last time. It really wasn't so hard as it looked, was it?

"Throw another one."

"O.K., load the lower barrel again."

Picking a clay bird out of the case, I loaded the hand trap and readied myself.

"Are you all set? Remember, just like last time. Don't stop your swing."

"O.K., O.K. What do I say? Oh, yes. Pull."

I threw the bird as near the same spot as I could. She broke it.

Luck, I thought to myself. I threw another one and she broke that one, too. Flushed with success, she made me throw several more birds before I could get the gun back.

My wife's introduction to the fascination of wingshooting came about quite by accident. Well, almost by accident. She had agreed, reluctantly, to throw a few clay targets for me so I could get some practice before the opening of grouse and woodcock seasons. After I had broken a few clays, she became interested in the challenge presented by the black clay disc, and asked if she could try shooting. We consulted for a few minutes on stance, hold and swing, and I began to throw straightaway and slightly angled shots for her. She missed a few at first, but soon got on them and began to break birds consistently. I didn't try to throw any sharply angled crossing shots for her since I wanted to build confidence and end the session on a note of success rather than frustration. A little positive reinforcement in the early stages of the learning process does wonders for keeping interest and enthusiasm at high levels. The task of convincing the novice that there's no magic to becoming a reasonably good wingshot becomes markedly easier.

Informal clay target shooting is the best way I know to introduce your wife, girlfriend, or any novice to the shotgun sports. She may be reluctant to shoot trap or skeet because she doesn't want to go out on the range for fear of being embarrassed in front of all those people when the inevitable misses occur.The first lessons of wingshooting are best learned somewhere out of the limelight where there are no distractions and the beginner can concentrate entirely on the fundamentals of shooting. Once a beginner has mastered these fundamentals, he or she is on the way to becoming a wingshot. There is a sense of achievement in hitting a flying object which, for many people, is unmatched in any other form of shooting. Women are not immune to the enchantment of the shotgun.

Correctly chosen equipment is essential in teaching someone to shoot. The correct equipment can mean the difference between enthusiasm and disappointment.

Let's look at guns first. Generally, we want one that is on the light side that fits her reasonably well, and we should start out with light loads of fine shot in a gauge that won't batter her around uncomfortably. I think that

first shooting sessions should not be done with a 12 gauge gun. Even with target loads, the big gun can be uncomfortable, particularly to a slightly built and inexperienced shooter.

On the other hand, don't go to one of the small gauges. Too often the mistake is made of starting someone off with a .410. The small shot charge and tight boring puts the beginner at an immediate disadvantage. It is an expert's gun, and properly belongs in the hands of an experienced shooter.

The 28 gauge is actually a better choice, since it throws more shot and produces more effective patterns. However, it is probably the least popular of all the gauges, and if it were not a required event in skeet competition, this boring might well become obsolete.

As you've probably guessed by now, the 20 gauge is my choice for a lady's first shotgun. There is nothing wrong with a 16 either, but it is far less popular and few guns are now being made for it. The 20, however, is delightful. It is smaller and trimmer than the 12 and it kicks less. Still, even target and the lightest field loads throw ⅞ ounces of shot and provide effective pattern coverage for shooting clays. The smaller dimensions and lighter weight of the 20 coordinate well with the smaller build of most women. If a gun "feels" right, you're apt to shoot it better. In a nutshell, the 20 is enough gun to make hitting easy and build confidence, but not so much gun that it becomes intimidating to the beginning shooter.

Open boring is essential. Don't go out there with a modified or full choked field gun and expect her to hit anything with it. Improved cylinder or skeet boring is the ticket. We're after wide, evenly distributed patterns. A skeet gun is a good choice or a light, open bored upland gun.

Action type is a matter of preference and pocketbook, if you are contemplating buying a gun for your wife. Double guns balance well, are shorter overall, and may feel more comfortable to the beginner. Pumps and autoloaders are less expensive than good side by side and over-under guns. And most have the advantage of interchangable barrels. Also, the apparent recoil of a gas operated autoloader is somewhat less.

Stock fit is vitally important. Smaller women will probably require a shortened stock. Drop at comb and pitch are also important, but will probably come close to being correct, on most newer guns, than will length of pull. At any rate, don't make any adjustments at the outset. It will probably require several shooting sessions to determine correct fit, since beginners seldom shoulder the gun in a consistent manner. After the pupil has gained some practice and had some instruction in proper stance and hold, then it's time to take up the finer points of fit. Stock length can be adjusted easily. A slip-on pad will lengthen it, or, more likely, it can be shortened. If the gun in question is one of your pets, however, a new stock or a new gun may be in order.

It's best to start out with a hand trap. This device allows infinite variation in angle, speed and height. Although you will want to stick with straightaway and climbing birds at first, don't try to throw them too slowly Key the pupil's reaction times to a briskly thrown bird.

How do you teach lead? This can be a problem, for lots of wingshots can't explain how they shoot, much less teach someone else their method. A number of wingshooting styles exist, each having its adherents and each claiming advantages for certain types of shooting. For the beginner, teach them to shoot with both eyes open, concentrate on the bird, and follow through. Judging lead at varying angles is a business for computers, not wingshots. Try to keep things simple and instinctive. Tell the beginner to blot out the bird and keep swinging.

Swing and follow through are only learned by practice, so after suitable preparation, move off to the side and start on crossing shots. Inconsistent throws can lead to broken concentration and frustration, so I usually switch to a foot trap. This gives me consistent throws as well as more speed and greater distance.

Gun safety is a matter that should be stressed from the very beginning. Practice sessions should include some provision for hearing protection. Clothing should be casual, comfortable and non-binding. If you're serious about teaching her to shoot, and perhaps later hunt, don't try to outfit her with hand-me-downs.

Shooting and hunting are different things, of course, and a woman who enjoys breaking clay birds may not take quickly to shooting feathered ones. If she enjoys the outdoors to begin with, however, chances are good that she will enjoy hunting also. Women are exceedingly well represented on the trap and skeet field, and the *1970 Nationol Survey of Fishing ond Hunting*, published by the Department of the Interior, pegs the number of female hunters at 869,000. If your lady is concerned that she will be the only one out there you might point out that she really has quite a bit of female company.

A husband and wife who shoot and hunt together share, through common experiences, an understanding and enjoyment of the outdoors. It is a delight to be able to communicate the expectations of an autumn morning or the quiet solitude of the winter woods to another person—especially if it is your wife. And all it may take is a little effort, encouragement, and understanding. If you've got a wife, you're already halfway there. □

Kirsten V. Rehder

"Tally-Ho!"

Fox hunting is a Virginia tradition that has enjoyed nearly 300 years of popularity; but will it endure in face of economic crises and fuel shortages? Probably.

by Jane Ellet

"There is a blessing in the air,
Which seems a sense of joy to yield
To the bare trees, and mountains bare,
And grass in the green field."

William Wordsworth
"To My Sister"

A hushed stillness, falling as softly as snow on itself, hangs from the pines and bare-limbed oaks that cover the Blue Ridge Mountains in central Virginia. This stillness encloses the group of horses and riders, hounds and huntsman in a timeless moment of morning communion. It is the day of the Blessing: the ceremony that officially opens the fox-hunting season lasting from November to March for the Bedford County Hunt, a club whose members live in and around Lynchburg, Virginia.

Morning mist steams off the dried grass on this particular warm day in November where the Hunt gathers in an open field. The Master of Fox-Hounds, in his scarlet coat and white breeches, splendid atop a muscled black thoroughbred, calls for the riders and spectators to make a large circle with him as the center. Once the ring of horses is complete, and all is quiet once more, a hunting horn is blown; its mournful cry, carried by the wind to distant hills, announces the arrival of the hounds and the huntsman. Both entities move as one into the center of the circle, brown and white hounds spill over each other in an effort to get as close as possible to the blower of that horn—their Master, the Huntsman, who sits in complete command with a horn at his lips, the hounds at his feet, the sun all around.

A minister, his long white robe ruffling in the morning breeze, walks into the center of the ring and stands amidst the now-stilled hounds. He is the Reverend Louis C. Fischer III, vicar of St. Thomas' Church in Sedalia and St. Stephen's Church in Forest, Virginia, whose parishioners own land used by the Hunt. In return for this privilege of hunting on their property, the churches receive donations given at the Blessing.

The minister raises his arms as if to hold the hounds, the horses, the sky in his grasp and prays:

"Bless, O Lord, these hounds who spend their lives for our safety, well-being and pleasure. May we learn from their zeal in the chase, a zest for life. . .We pray for all these horses, strong, spirited, and enduring. . .We pray for all the wild creatures, especially the fox whom you have made wise and strong and beautiful. Amen."

An occasional snort or whinney, mixed with the stomping of hoofs and the rustling of programs, breaks the solemn stillness. A hound yelps. Another ambles from the pack, nose sniffing the ground, tail pointed at the sky. The Huntsman's voice cuts through the air, calling him back, and with the help of the "whipper-in" (staff members who assist with the hounds) the prodigal son returns to the pack. The hounds are restless, excited by the scent of horses, people, and sudden freedom from their caged runs. This restlessness intensifies when the minister begins to sing a hymn. As his voice mounts in a high crescendo of prayer and song, the hounds, as one body, lift their noses to the sky, and join in with long howls that bounce from hill to hill. These animals are a type of American hound known as Penn Maradel and are noted for their loud voices.

After the ceremony, the Hunt "queues-up" to begin the chase. While the Huntsman and hounds and "whippers-in" cast off first, seaching the mountain for a scent that would lend good sport, the rest of the Hunt, known as the Field, participate in a traditional drink, usually a whiskey sour, called the stirrup cup. This drink in not only traditional but functional. It warms the body on cold winter mornings, and, as one senior member says, "It helps get you over the first fence."

An eerie cry falls to the field from somewhere high in the mountain where the Huntsman and hounds dissolve into the mist. Suddenly, the hounds' voices fill the mountainside, and the ground shakes under the pounding of hoofs. The Master, in answer to the horn's cry, has called for the hunt to begin.

A class system exists even in the wildest of chases, and hunting etiquette demands strict adherence to this system. At the head of the field rides the Master, whose job is to lead the riders during the hunt. Under no circumstance may a rider pass the Master—a *faux-pas* that is easy to commit when an excited horse gets carried away with the chase. Next in line are the honorary members who wear pink coats or the Hunt's colors, brown and gold, on the facings of their black coats. The right to wear the particular riding habit associated with the Hunt must be earned. When a member has earned his colors by good sportsmanship and fellowship, he has the privilege of riding up front. Members without colors ride behind; adults first, then the junior members. Last in line are the hilltoppers, or riders who do not jump the fences either because the horse is too young or the rider too inexperienced.

The hunting attire is traditional as well as functional. The black hunting cap is reinforced and designed to protect the head. The white stock worn around the rider's neck can be a bandage in case of emergency, such as a severed tendon on the horse or a broken arm of the rider. Also, the plain safety pin that is worn in the stock secures this emergency bandage in place. The scarlet coat, which is also called the "hunting pink," is the most visible color of the spectrum, and only worn by members of staff as a badge of honor. Conventional riding breeches, beige or white, and black melton

"Suddenly, the hounds' voices fill the mountainside and the ground shakes under the pounding of hoofs."

coats are used by all the other riders. The black hunting boots are worn for support and for protection against rubbings from trees and brush.

Cleanliness of the horse and tack is another part of hunting etiquette. One member says that in order for her horse, a very light grey, to be clean on winter mornings, she must wash him in her basement, using a blow-dryer to dry his coat. On special hunts such as the Blessing or joint meets with other clubs, the horse's mane is braided in tight braids that lie flat on the neck, and the tail is plaited in a French braid that extends up to the base of the tail bone. Saddles, costing anywhere from $250 to $1,200, are cleaned and oiled before and after the hunt, along with the bridle and the rider's boots. After the horse, the tack, and the rider have been brushed, polished, and cleaned, they are said to be "turned out" and ready for sport. An old saying explains another piece of hunting terminology: A Texan was invited to England to participate in a hunt. After observing the Texan for some time, the Master rode alongside and said, "Say, old chap, it is 'tally-ho the fox,' not 'there goes the little____.'"

Ninety-five percent of these little ____ end up safely in their dens after a chase that usually lasts from two to three hours.

"Sport is what we're interested in," says Claire Cox, current Joint-Master of the Bedford County Hunt. "We don't want to kill them. In fact, the fox seems to have just as much fun as we do. I guess that's because he's the only one who knows where he's going. In England, they stop up the holes so the fox can't get home. We couldn't stop up the holes even if we wanted to because most of our hunting is done by permission of the landowners."

Although other Hunts in Virginia face the problem of land shrinkage, the Bedford County Hunt is unique in having continued access to good hunting territory. The Hunt rotates in three areas: the mountainous terrain of Forest, Virginia in Bedford County, the rolling fields northwest of Lynchburg at the stables of Randolph-Macon Woman's College, and the Blue Ridge Mountains northeast of Lynchburg at Sweetbriar College.

Although the Bedford Hunt has no problem with lack of land, it still faces an economic crisis. Hunting is an expensive, time-consuming sport, and one that relies on gasoline to transport riders and horses to hunting areas.

Pennsylvania and housed at kennels in Forest.

"Bill has a good pack," says Claire Cox. "They're getting better all the time. You see, hounds must be uniform; you ought to be able to throw a blanket over them."

But there was a time when the pack was not so uniform. Before the 1969 establishment of a professional Huntsman and permanent kennels, the Hunt Club used hounds belonging to independent members.

"These hounds were a wild pack, under no control," says Claire Cox, Huntsman from 1960 to 1965. "I trained four or five to stay together, using a cow-horn 'cause I wasn't strong enough to blow a hunting horn, but the type of hound that we had then—Walker Hound—was a field hound and not made to hunt in a pack."

Later, these were bred with English hounds, producing a bigger, less timid animal called a Cross-bred.

"It was at this time that we didn't even know what the hounds were after," says one senior member. "I remember when we chased a fox for hours all over the mountain. Usually you can tell if it's a gray or red fox by the way they run. You see, a gray runs in circles, while a red runs straight. Well, this fox was running in circles, and then straight, and then in circles, and we didn't know what type we had. Finally the hounds gathered excitedly around an old oak tree. We figured we'd finally tree'd the fox. Well, we sure had tree'd a gray animal—a feisty squirrel!"

The Bedford County Hunt Club began in 1937 as a small organization of horse-lovers who met in various fields surrounding Lynchburg. Less than twenty-eight years later, in 1965, the organization had grown to well over 100 members, and had reached top status as a recognized hunt by the Masters of Fox-Hounds Association of America. This club, one of the 100 recognized hunts in America, is carrying on a Virginia tradition which began in 1691 with the arrival of the first fox-hound in Virginia. The sport became ingrained in Virginia's heritage by capturing the enthusiasm of George Washington, known to be an avid huntsman in northern Virginia.

Fox-hunting: A part of the past that exists in the present. But for how long? At the end of the decade, will this sport only be a conglomeration of firelight memories and pictures in a scrapbook, or will the hunting horn continue to echo across the rolling hills as on-going tradition in Virginia's heritage?

"Will the hunting horn continue to echo across the rolling hills in Virginia?"

In 1980, as during WWII when the Club had to be temporarily discontinued, financial factors limit the number of participants.

"Ironically," says Huntsman Bill King, "even though we have fewer riding members this year, we have had the best season that we've ever had because farmers around here are not trapping foxes as they used to." Bill King, formerly the Huntsman for the Radnor Hunt in Pennsylvania, is in charge of the care and training of the Club's twenty couples of Penn Maradel hounds which were brought from

"One moment now may give us more
Than years of toiling reason:
Our minds shall drink at every pore
The spirit of the season."

William Wordsworth
"To My Sister"

Jane Ellett of Lynchburg has been published in Lynchburg *Magazine and is a recent winner of* Mademoiselle *Magazine's College Board and Guest Editor competition. This is her first contribution to* Virginia Wildlife.

by Carl "Spike" Knuth

Hunting mourning doves can be disconcerting for the beginner, but the payoff spurs the hunter on.

The Gray Ghost

Leonard Lee Rue

They came in singles, pairs, groups of four or five, and in flocks of up to two dozen. I had watched mourning doves in flight before, but until now—as I stood in tall corn at the edge of a harvested field with a shotgun cradled in my arms—I had never realized just how crazily they flew. Doves naturally fly in a dipping, rising, zig-zagging style, often tipping left, then right. I had been standing patiently, watching flights of doves going every which way. The field resounded with shotgun blasts, shouts, laughter and groans from the others in the fields around me. My patience was wearing thin. I hadn't had a chance to shoot as yet and I was getting edgy. At long last a pair of doves slipped behind me along a tree-line and headed right towards me. As they approached, I thought to myself, "A piece of cake!" The 12 gauge came up and barked once—then again—as I pulled the trigger. They continued on as I stared in disbelief without even bothering to pump my third shell into the chamber.

This was my first southern dove shoot. I was hunting in Goochland County, Virginia by invitation of a good friend, Spencer Winn, who had organized the hunt on private land. I was finding out that part of the agony of dove hunting was that doves look deceptively easy to hit. Because of the dove's flight style, the gunner frequently peppers the sky with shot, shooting the dove "where he ain't!" Flying at speeds sometimes topping 50 mph, with an always erratic flight path and small size, the mourning dove does indeed present a challenging target.

Even though it is considered a songbird in 18 states, the mourning dove has become the most popular upland game bird in the states where it is managed for hunting. Its populations have continued to increase in those states where they are hunted. There was a time when the mourning dove was somewhat of a minor species among the dove family. The passenger pigeon dominated the scene with huge numbers until habitat loss and over-shooting caused its extinction. The mourning dove has seemingly filled the biological void left by the passenger pigeon. The land-use

changes that proved harmful to the passenger pigeon have proven beneficial to the mourning dove. Its nesting habitat has increased in area. The mourning dove is thriving, due to more intensive farming, large, open cropfields of grains, plus more weed fields and increased water sources in the form of reservoirs and farm ponds.

In the last two decades, dove shooting has produced a tremendous increase in the number of hunters taking to the fields in September to hunt the "gray ghost." Today, many states especially manage fields for doves and those with any good concentrations of birds are usually heavily hunted. Dove shooting has been greatly enhanced by the development of dove field management. This is especially true in the southeastern states where game managers plant small acreages to brown-top, German and Japanese millet; milo, corn, and soybeans to attract doves. The millets and common fox-tail grasses are highly preferred dove foods, since they mature quickly and drop to the ground where it is made available to feeding doves.

Each year, dove hunters bag up to 40 million birds, and yet hunting is of relatively minor importance when it comes to dove mortality. Probably less than ten percent and certainly no more than 15 percent of the dove populations are shot by hunters. The continental population of mourning doves is estimated at about 400 million birds.

The mourning dove is similar to another cousin, the domestic pigeon or rock dove, but is smaller. Its sleek, streamlined body varies in length from 11 to 13 inches with a weight of three and one-half to six ounces. Its rakish look is due to its smooth body, long, forward-set wings and narrow, pointed tail. Its basic coloration is grayish olive-brown above a buffy-brown head, neck and forehead, and a bluish gray crown. Its flight feathers are bluish-gray as are its tail feathers, although they are black at the ends, tipped with white.

The mourning dove gets its name from its mournful "cooing" call, which it utters from sunrise to sunset during mating. It is the cooing call that attracts the female. While man's land-use practices have played an important role in the increase in dove populations, it is the dove's ability to take advantage of them that has really helped it to multiply. The mourning dove is very prolific, with each pair bringing off more than one brood per year—sometimes up to five or more. In more southerly climes, they nest as early as February and as late as September. Doves prefer scattered woodlands and groves surrounded by flat open lands for a nest site. The nest is a frail platform of twigs and is so poorly constructed that numerous nests with eggs are destroyed by storms or high winds. The normal brood of two young hatch in 15 days and grow to flight stage in two weeks—fed on a rich diet of special milk produced within the parent birds. It has the widest breeding range of any of our game birds, extending from British Columbia to Ontario and Maine, south to central Mexico and Cuba.

Doves are primarily seed-eaters, showing a definite preference for small, round seeds. Doves feed early in the morning and mid-afternoon, moving to water as evening approaches. Water is extremely important to the dove as is grit and sand which are needed to aid in digestion. After fulfilling these needs they go to roost. It is these habits that dove hunters take advantage of when hunting doves.

hunters each season. A traditional dove shoot—especially in more southerly states—is quite an event. Often the hunters gather for lunch to enjoy food and conversation before going into the fields, with legal shooting at noon. While there are a number of ways to hunt doves, the most popular way is field shooting on large acres of harvested or partially-harvested crops. While purposely dumping crops constitutes baiting and is illegal, it is normally legal to hunt over residue left by mechanical harvesting equipment during the normal course of harvesting. If doves find a good feeding area they'll use it regularly until the food is depleted.

It was a traditional Virginia dove hunt that found me standing at the edge of a harvested field watching for doves. After lunch we had sat around talking, joking and digesting. The usual conversation was about hunting dogs, the best shot gun, past dove shoots, who was going to get the first dove and other topics of world importance. At about 2 p.m., we gathered up our shotguns, dove stools, knapsacks, coolers, and plenty of dove loads and headed for the dove fields.

Now I stood there thinking how unique dove hunting was: in many cases, the more hunters, the better. Carefully placed around large fields, hunters can often keep turning the doves into gun range of others, plus more territory can be covered. Of course it is important to keep everyone out of range of each other.

It was about 3 p.m. when the doves started coming, rocketing through the skies in singles or in flocks. After I had missed for the seventh time, doubt and insecurity began to set in. I even passed up a shot for fear of missing again! "What am I doing wrong?" I asked myself. I began practicing bringing the gun up, following an imaginary dove through the sky. Calming myself, I set my jaw and dared a dove to come my way. A pair came streaking across the field toward me and . . . "How could I miss that one?" "I must have shot behind him!" Now I began talking out loud to myself. "Ooo! I think I got a piece of that one—I saw feathers!" Zero for nine! "How can they fly so 'crookety'?" Zero for ten! "I don't believe it !!" This dove hunt was turning out to be an afternoon of agony. At first I was confident that my two boxes of shells would be sufficient, but my confidence was melting in the Virginia sun about as fast as the pile of empty shell casings grew around my feet!

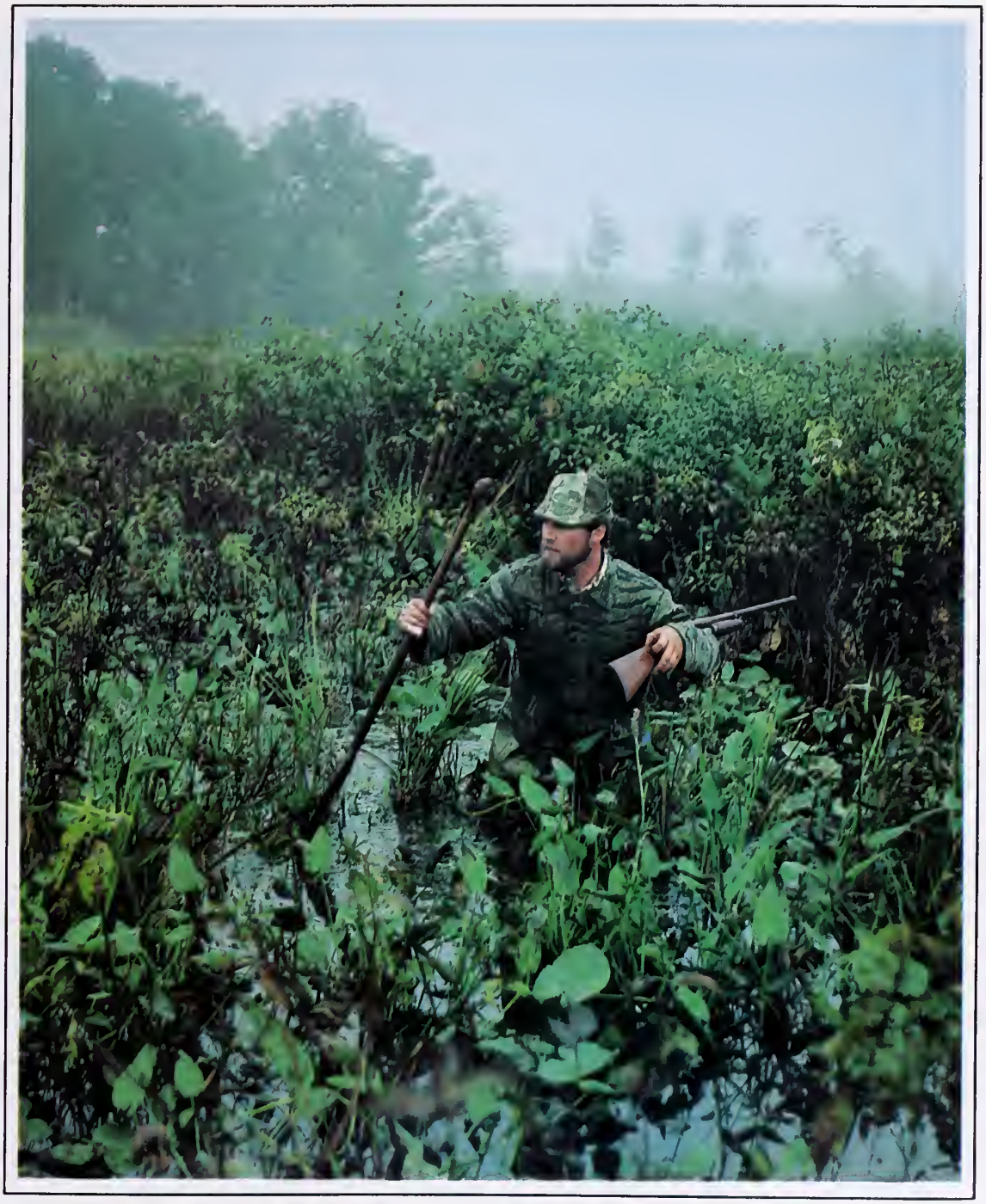
An expert shot may get his 12 to 15 doves with one box, but one dove in five to seven shots is closer to average. I was zero for 12! In analyzing my own problem, I figured most doves are missed mainly because the gunner does not lead the bird enough nor at the right speed and, more importantly, fails to follow through as he pulls the trigger. Consequently, he shoots behind the bird. Failure to get the stock up on the shoulder properly results in shooting above the birds. In my own defense, I was shooting my fullchoke duck gun when a modified or improved cylinder with a more open pattern would have been far more effective. I managed to get 10 birds with 41 shots—average for some, fantastic for me. I was in ecstasy!

Probably the majority of the 40 million doves are bagged on the first few days of the season. In many cases this is due to the fact that the doves have formed a daily routine prior to the season's opening. Continued heavy shooting pressure ultimately forces doves to change their habits and movements after the opening. Then too, doves will eventually consume all available food in the field which sends them to new feeding grounds. The first cold snap will also send doves southward, but also brings an influx of more birds from the north. However, with each succeeding cold wave, dove numbers dwindle rapidly as they head for warmer climate.

The ultimate ecstasy of dove hunting is the special bonus to all the enjoyable activities associated with a dove shoot. The mourning dove provides some mighty fine eating as well as sport. While doves may be small, the dark, tasty meat is rich and filling and it doesn't take too many to satisfy. I prefer to cut out the breasts—sternum, ribs and all. Then I wash them thoroughly in cold water, pat them dry, then roll them in seasoned flour. Using a fry pan, I brown about 12 breasts in butter, then add about 3/4 of a cup of Burgundy wine, and about five large, fresh, sliced mushrooms and simmer until the breasts are tender.

The mourning dove, an enjoyable song bird to watch and photograph and our most popular game bird gives us both agonizing and ecstatic moments in the field. It does provide enjoyment, a challenge and some mighty fine eating. □

Carl "Spike" Knuth is audio-visual supervisor for the Game Commission's education division.



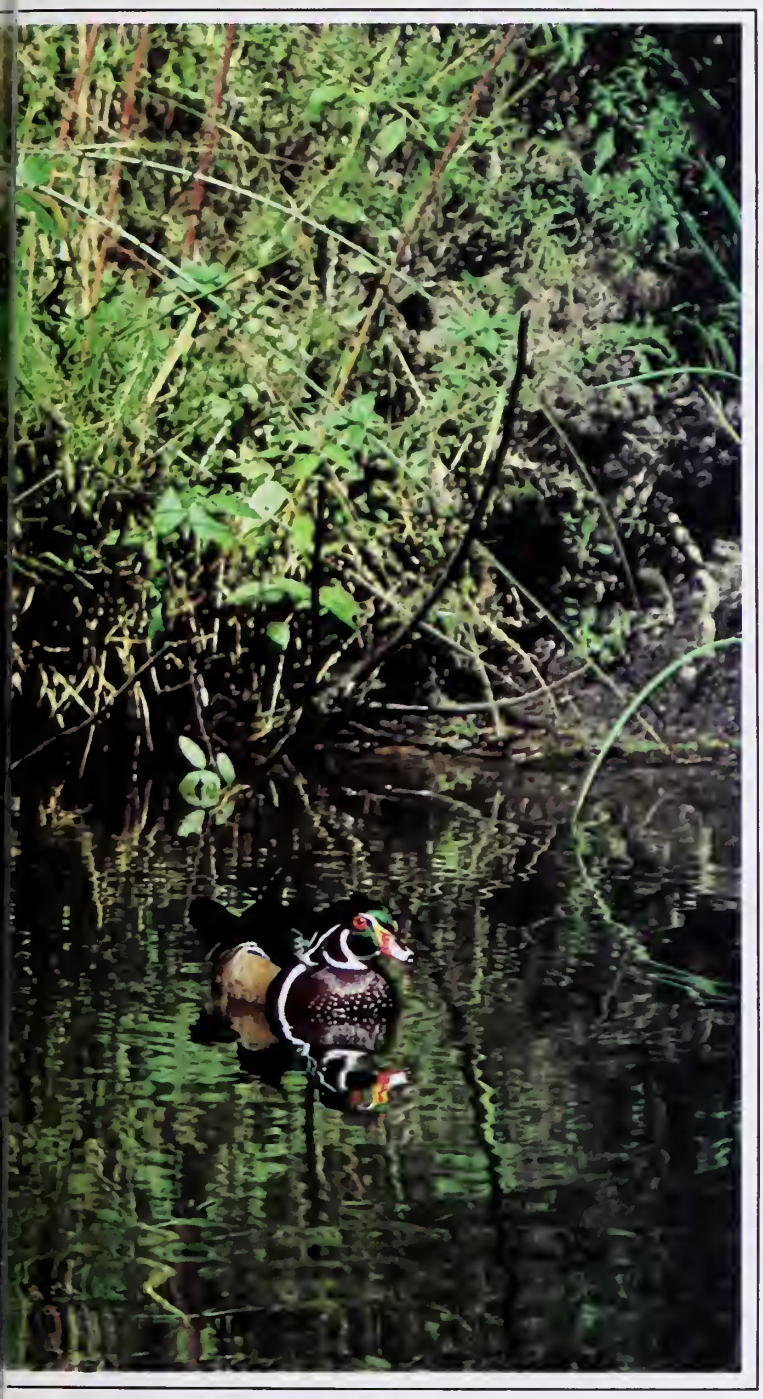
Early Duckin'

If you don't jump at the chance to sit in a blind on a raw winter morning, consider early waterfowl season

by Dinny Slaughter

When I was a boy in Talbot County on Maryland's Eastern Shore, the local hunters never went duck hunting. They just went "duckin'." Although duckin' was good in those pre-WW II days, my most vivid memories are of the terrible, bone-chilling cold. Facing into a 30-mile-an-hour wind on a narrow point of beach overlooking the Wye River produced numb toes, frozen fingers and runny noses. Thankfully, that has changed, at least here in Virginia. I don't know when it began, but just three years ago I discovered the early waterfowl season, held the first week in October. This is a fantastic boon to those of us who don't enjoy the weather extremes occuring during the late season. October has always been a special month for me. I love its cool mornings and fall colors. Add to that some fast shooting at wood ducks and teal, followed by the bow season and some excellent fishing, and you probably have the best month of the year for sportsmen.

Ducks can be hunted in several ways during the early season—drifting down rivers and jump shooting along creeks are both popular and have their advantages. But for me, the biggest thrill is gunning in the shallows found at the headwaters of most of the larger lakes. These marshy wetlands are usually densely covered by a growth of lily pads, cattail, marsh grass, and other aquatic weeds. Often there is standing timber, both living and dead, lending an eerie atmosphere to the area, especially in pre-dawn darkness. These marshy areas can be full of resting and feeding wood ducks, teal and an occasional mallard. How to get within shotgun range without spooking the birds is a major problem.



My nephew Steve, who is a taxidermist when he's not hunting, has devised a method which works well for us. We rise early and load his twelve foot fiberglass canoe into the pickup. In the canoe are stored two pump guns with shells, two paddles, a 12-volt battery, an electric motor, and a piece of camouflage netting. Steve's garb, in addition to seasonal hunting clothing, includes chest waders and a waist preserver. I use hip boots and a Coast Guard approved camouflage life jacket. This jacket, with front pockets convenient for carrying camera, film, repellant, etc., gives me a sense of security while I'm in the small canoe over deep water.

Long before daylight, we put the canoe into the water of our chosen lake at whatever point is most accessible by pickup. Handling a small, heavily loaded canoe is a shaky experience, particularly in total darkness, but that's part of the game. The electric motor propels us quietly to the more remote coves of the lake, often a mile or more away. Once we penetrate the floating aquatic plants growing in the shallows, it is stowed and we continue slowly, using only our paddles. Eventually even they become useless as we enter the uppermost reaches of the swamp where the water is only inches deep and heavily clogged with growth. The paddles are then stowed with the motor and Steve quietly enters the water at the rear of the canoe for at this point we are entering the area most likely to harbor sleeping ducks. Quiet, gentle movements are an absolute necessity. At this point there is still at least a half hour before first light but the birds can usually be heard making small sounds as they begin to awaken for the new day. Steve, up to his thighs in swamp water, quietly maneuvers the canoe, progressing slowly as we approach the resting birds. Pushing the canoe is not a job for everyone as the work is tiring and the muckish footing makes walking extremely difficult. But it practically guarantees good hunting. Most hunters are not able or willing to work that hard and in these early seasons Steve and I have never seen another duck hunter.

When progress with the canoe is no longer possible, I enter the water carefully, feeling for secure footing. Steve removes his gun and shells and one paddle from the canoe and disappears into the darkness. He will stop about 40 yards away so we can effectively cover more of the birds' flight path. I immediately cover the canoe with the camouflage net so it won't be visible from the air. While I'm standing comfortably in the cool water, mosquitoes attack and force me to resort to the repellant—a must on such hunting forays. There is absolute quiet but occasionally I hear distant gnawing or swimming sounds—muskrats probably. The Big Dipper is highly visible but my watch is not. We're right on schedule. After daydreaming for a few minutes, I come suddenly awake at the metallic sound of Steve's pump gun being loaded. The birds are talking now, some making short flights of a few yards, others splashing around shattering the quiet. The Big Dipper has suddenly vanished and shooting time is near as I prepare my old pre-war Winchester pump. As I pull my full-face camouflage mask down, I wonder if I should take the day's first bird, a blue-winged teal, and risk the wrath of my nephew should I miss. The teal is above me at about 10 yards when I fire, and miss! Steve fires three times behind me and I hear two splashes as downed birds hit the marsh water. With the first shooting birds begin getting up throughout the swamp; the morning flight is on.

In less than ten minutes it's all over. Too many empty shells bob in the water about me and I try to remember where the dead birds went down. We wait another hour but the morning hunt is over. Slowly, by feeling along the bottom with his paddle for footing, and carrying his shotgun, Steve follows my directions and retrieves all my downed birds. This is dangerous and exhausting work and I am fortunate and grateful to have such an experienced and well trained retriever.

The return trip down the lake is anticlimactic but restful. The first signs of fall color appear on the lower limbs of maples at the water's edge. I'm lost in thoughts of country bacon and eggs when three woodies move up to the shore line, reminding me of that first teal—how could I have missed him? As the woodies disappear, Steve murmurs, "We'll get them tomorrow." □

Dinny Slaughter is a regular contributor to Virginia Wildlife, *as a writer and photographer. He lives in Front Royal.*

Some favorites of wildlife are autumn olive (top left), green briar (top right), and multiflora rose (below).

by Carl "Spike" Knuth

The Hedgerow

Nature's Lifeline

It was a cool, crisp morning. Skies were a bright blue with fluffy white clouds. Strong westerly winds blew in on the heels of a Canadian cold front. As I walked alongside the hedgerow, I noted that it was literally alive with migrating song birds. Juncos flashed white tail feathers as they slipped in and out of thickets. Flocks of robins swept through in waves consuming the different kinds of berries that still hung on barren branches.

A hedge- or fence-row is a brushy, wooded and grassy field border that performs an important ecological function. Hedgerows are places of shelter for wildlife, especially in winter. The many types of shrubs, plants and grasses give shelter from wind, rain, snow or ice. The hedgerow is also a place to live and reproduce in summer, providing nesting and denning places. In spring and autumn, hedgerows provide an abundance and variety of natural fruits and seeds as food and resting waysides for migrating birds. Blackberry and greenbriar thickets, wild grape vines, dogwood, service berry, staghorn sumac, poison ivy berries, and a multitude of others provide them with a varied menu. Legumes such as partridge pea, lespedezas and vetches grow in the grassy edges of hedgerows along with fox-tail grass providing a variety of seeds. Hundreds of other weeds and flowers also produce valuable wildlife foods. Occasionally a large oak or hickory matures in the hedgerows providing nuts for wandering deer and squirrels.

Hedgerows, like other habitat types pass through a series of stages—an endless process known as plant succession. Man has the capability of altering, slowing or maintaining this succession by physical means. Landowners or wildlife managers can maintain succession at an ideal stage for a particular wildlife species. In recent years, other types of plants and shrubs—not native to Virginia—have proven very beneficial to wildlife and have been planted extensively in hedgerows or to create hedgerows. They include bicolor lespedeza and autumn olive. Autumn olive is used by everything from robins and turkeys to deer and bear!

Actually, few people realize the importance of a hedgerow, as evidenced by the careless manner in which hedgerows are being destroyed. Often they are sprayed, mowed, cut and burned to simplify rights-of-way maintenance, reduce noxious weed growth and improve motorist visibility. An old Wisconsin Conservation Bulletin once reported, "Hedgerows were removed from field borders because they were considered a liability to machine operation, provided places for destructive insects to live and occupied land that could be used to produce crops."

Actually, when hedgerows were destroyed, losses in wildlife, beneficial insects and helpful plant-life occured. The value of a hedgerow was pin-pointed in an old Iowa study. It was found that a mile of good hedge- or shrub-row holds 20,000 beneficial lady-bugs, 54,000 injurious insects, 21 nesting birds, 21 small harmful animals and 28 beneficial ones. By contrast, a mile of barren sodrow contained only 500 lady-bugs, 79,000 injurious insects, 1.5 nesting birds, 84 harmful animals and 8 beneficial ones.

Hedgerows offer another benefit. Studies in West Germany show that proper hedgerow growth helps to retain up to 30% of the annual rainfall—a guard against drought, floods and erosion.

A Wisconsin study on a 4500 acre area from 1929 to 1960 showed some startling facts. It was found that as long as there was more than one mile of hedgerow per 450 acres of land, quail numbers average 22 per mile of hedgerow. By 1960, with less than one mile of hedgerow per 650 acres, quail have all but disappeared.

As I continued my walk along the hedgerow I noticed more varieties of plants. Numerous species of grasses, wild rose hips and pokeweed. Warblers, thrushes, finches and sparrows of all types fed and flitted ahead of me. Fallen leaves revealed nests of many sizes woven onto naked branches. A bright red male cardinal fairly glistened in the early afternoon sun as I left one of Nature's life lines. □

by Joan Cone

A Mixed Bag of Virginia Game Recipes

We Virginia sportsmen and sportswomen are fortunate to have hunting seasons which extend from early September until mid-February for a wide variety of game, all of which is delicious when properly prepared. So whenever we return from hunting, we should look forward to eating many delicious birds and mammals with better flavor and more nutritive value than can be found in supermarket meat.

Game should never be wasted. First of all, our dove, squirrel, rabbit, quail, grouse, deer, railbirds, woodcock and waterfowl are too good to be ignored. Equally important, the Kellert Report, a survey commissioned by the federal government, has found that an overwhelming majority of our fellow citizens are not opposed to hunting when the game is eaten.

The first step to delicious game meals is proper field care of all birds and other animals so that they reach the cook in first class condition. The second step is to serve outstanding game meals with the help of recipes like these which are simple to prepare, require only ingredients already on your shelves and are enjoyed by everyone.

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*SONNY BROWN'S VENISON ROAST **

6 strips bacon
1 medium to large venison roast
Several small slivers of garlic
Kitchen Bouquet
Salt and pepper
Flour
1 can (10¾ ounces) golden mushroom soup
½ can water
1 medium onion
1 can (4 ounces) mushrooms, drained

Cook bacon until crisp in large frying pan. Remove bacon, crush and set aside. Leave bacon fat in pan. Stick roast with knife and insert small slivers of garlic. Coat roast with Kitchen Bouquet, and salt and pepper it before lightly dusting with flour. Heat bacon fat and sear roast on all sides until thoroughly browned. Then set it aside for a moment. Meanwhile, in Dutch oven or other deep cooking pot, mix can of mushroom soup with ½ can of water. Remove enough rings from onion to cover roast, separate them and set aside. Dice remainder of onion and add to mushroom soup; heat and add salt and pepper to taste. Color this mixture slightly with Kitchen Bouquet. At this point place a rack in the bottom of your Dutch oven or other deep pot and place roast on the rack. Secure onion rings atop roast with wooden toothpicks. Sprinkle crushed bacon over top of roast and dot the same with mushrooms.Finally, cover and cook very slowly for about 3 hours or until completely done.

*BAKED PHEASANT OR GROUSE WITH APPLES**

1 pheasant quartered or 2 grouse, halved
4 tablespoons butter, divided
4 medium-sized cooking apples, peeled and chopped
1 teaspoon sugar
3 tablespoons cream or half and half
Salt and pepper to taste

Melt 3 tablespoons butter in a skillet and place pheasant or grouse pieces skin side down first; brown on all sides. Remove pheasant or grouse and add 1 tablespoon more butter to drippings in skillet. Saute chopped apples in skillet and add 1 teaspoon of sugar. When apples are a little softened, place them in bottom of a casserole. Put pheasant or grouse pieces on top of apples with juices from pan. Pour cream over the pheasant or grouse and add salt and pepper. Cover casserole and bake in a 350° oven for 1 to 1½ hours or until meat is fork tender. (Serves 3)

*ORANGE BRANDIED WILD DUCK**

2 medium or large ducks
Salt
1 large orange, quartered
2 small onions
1 tablespoon flour
½ cup frozen orange juice concentrate, thawed
¼ cup brandy
2 tablespoons brandy

Salt ducks inside and out. Place 2 orange quarters and 1 onion in each cavity. If ducks are fatty, prick skin with a sharp fork. Place a large (14" x 20") oven cooking bag in a 2-inch deep roasting pan. Add flour to bag along with orange juice concentrate and brandy. Stir mixture with a plastic or wooden spoon. Place ducks in bag, close with twist tie and make 6 half-inch slits on top of bag. Place in a 375° oven for 1¼ to 1½ hours, or until tender. Skim off any fat and add 2 tablespoons brandy to gravy. Heat but do not boil. Cut ducks in half and garnish platter with thin slices of orange and a teaspoon of currant jelly in center of each slice. (Serves 4)

LOUISE SCOTT'S TERIYAKI DUCK

Louise Scott is the wife of the chairman of the Miami, Florida Chapter of Ducks Unlimited. This is her favorite recipe for preparing ducks: it's only for those who like their ducks rare!

Cut ducks in half and remove backbone and ribs. Marinate the halves in teriyaki sauce (below) for about 6 hours in the refrigerator. Place ducks skin side up on a hot grill and cook about 5 minutes. Turn ducks and cook skin side down for 7 to 10 minutes or just until rare. (Allow ½ duck per serving)

TERIYAKI SAUCE

1 cup soy sauce
¼ cup brown sugar
2 cloves garlic, minced
¼ teaspoon onion powder
2 tablespoons lemon juice or vermouth
1 teaspoon ground ginger

Mix all ingredients together and use as marinade for ducks.

SQUIRREL OR RABBIT IN CROCKPOT *

3 to 6 squirrels, cut in half, or 1 to 2 rabbits, cut into serving pieces
¼ cup firmly packed brown sugar
¼ cup soy sauce
3 tablespoons lemon or lime juice
¼ cup water
¼ teaspoon garlic powder
¼ teaspoon ground ginger

Place squirrel halves or rabbit pieces in crockpot. Mix all ingredients in a small bowl and pour over meat. Cover and cook on LOW heat for 7 to 8 hours. To thicken gravy, use either flour or cornstarch mixed with water. Cook on HIGH until thickened.

CURRIED VENISON SOUP

½ cup sliced green onion
2 tablespoons butter
1 tablespoon curry powder
1 teaspoon garlic salt
4 cups tomato juice
2 cups diced, cooked venison
¼ cup raisins
1 tablespoon lime juice
1 large green banana
Sliced almonds for garnish

In a large saucepan, saute green onion in butter until tender. Add curry powder and garlic salt; cook 1 minute. Blend in tomato juice; then add venison, raisins and lime juice. Cover and simmer for 30 minutes. Cut banana through the peel into chunks. Remove peel from each chunk and add to soup. Cover and simmer 30 minutes more. Sprinkle with almonds to serve. (Makes 6 to 8 servings)

RACK AND SADDLE OF VENISON *

The choicest parts of any big game animal are the rack, which includes the chops, and the saddle, which contains the tenderloin. Both these cuts are the only ones which can be open roasted without toughness resulting. Yet even they must be done very quickly in a hot oven and are best served rare.

Trim both of these cuts well and remove chine bone. Rub outside of meat with peanut or olive oil and place in a roasting pan. Roast in a very hot oven, 400° to 425° until meat is seared. Then lower heat to 375° and cook until meat is rare (130° to 135° on meat thermometer). Salt meat after removing from oven.

The tenderloin can be removed from the saddle and sliced as you would fillet mignon. The rack should be cut into chops for easy serving. Serve with this sauce, if you wish.

*HORSERADISH SAUCE**

½ cup heavy cream
½ teaspoon salt
Dash cayenne pepper
3 tablespoons prepared horseradish
1 tablespoon vinegar

Beat cream until stiff. Fold in remaining ingredients. (Makes about ¾ cup)

Joan Cone of Williamsburg is one of Virginia Wildlife's *best known and most popular contributors. She is the author of two books on game and fish cooking. Autographed copies of her latest book, FISH AND GAME COOKING, are available for $9 ppd. from Mrs. Cone at P.O. Box 242, Department VW, Williamsburg, Virginia 23185.*

Starred (*) recipes are included in FISH AND GAME COOKING by Joan Cone, published 1981 by EPM Publications, McLean, Virginia.

Hunter Education Steps Into the Eighties

by Harry Gillam

Virginia's Hunter Safety Program, born in 1961, began to come of age in 1981 with the help of federal funding. Although the cost per graduate of Virginia's program had been, at 30¢, one of the lowest in the nation, instructors were operating with little equipment (if any), inadequate training and no evaluation or certification of their work.

Safety is not a glamourous subject, and good presentation is required to help the student retain enough to be safety-conscious when he is afield. The new Sportsman's Education Program is designed to be attractive and effective.

Although 27,917 students were graduated during the 1980-81 fiscal year, the major effort was on "training the trainers." Six lieutenants from the Game Commission's warden force were certified to train instructors in their respective districts. In turn, they trained 229 new instructors, bringing the number in the system to 514. Existing instructors received training in ethics and advanced teaching methods. Through the National Archery Association, the same lieutenants earned qualification to train instructors in bowhunting.

While the hunting accident rate has been decreasing, other factors have become important in the area of hunter training. Increasing numbers of hunters and decreasing amounts of territory available for hunting are creating greater numbers and kinds of interpersonal problems and conflicts. These occur not only among hunters themselves, but between hunters and landowners, and even among groups or organizations of people who may or may not be hunters themselves. In response, the Virginia hunter training program has been gradually changing over the past 15 years. The aspect of safety has not been de-emphasized. On the contrary, the methods and techniques for teaching safety have been greatly improved and tailored to the types of accidents which have presented the greatest problems. However, there have been a number of additions to the training curriculum. The course duration has increased from four to six hours and increasing emphasis has been placed on such topics as landowner relations, ethical behavior, wildlife identification, and environmental conservation law.

An integrated training program has been laid out to produce three levels of instructors: instructor, senior instructor and master instructor. Instructors must have completed both the six-hour student course plus eight hours of instructor training in teaching technique. Senior instructors must complete advanced training in ethics, archery and muzzleloading. Master instructors must complete trapping, wildlife management, shotgun/rifle/pistol skills, and first aid and survival.

Videotape is scheduled to play a much greater role in student and instructor training. Pre-recorded programs are being aired in classrooms and on public television stations this fall. Television is also being used to bring experts from around the country into the classroom so future instructors can have the best training available. When they are nearing graduation, they take their own turns before the TV camera so they can see their own faults.

Eventually, the Game Commission's outdoor education program will include courses on fishing and other aspects of outdoor living. But for now, hunter education is coming into its own. Virginia's youths will be better prepared to go afield safely, and without offending man or nature. □

VIRGINIA — NRA
HUNTER EDUCATION REQUIRED TRAINING

STUDENT HUNTER EDUCATION COURSE 6 HOUR → APPLICATION AND PRE-TEST FOR HUNTER EDUCATION INSTRUCTOR'S → BASIC INSTRUCTOR COURSE 8 HOURS → CERTIFIED HUNTER EDUCATION INSTRUCTOR 14 HOURS →

ETHICS 4 HOURS → ARCHERY 6 HOURS → MUZZLELOADING 6 HOURS → TRAIN 100 STUDENTS → SENIOR HUNTER EDUCATION INSTRUCTOR 16 HOURS →

TRAPPING 6 HOURS → WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT 6 HOURS → SHOTGUN—RIFLE PISTOL 12 HOURS → FIRST AID SURVIVAL 2 HOURS WOODMANSHIP 4 HOURS → TRAIN 500 STUDENTS → MASTER HUNTER EDUCATION INSTRUCTOR 30 HOURS

Take the Virginia Hunter Education Course Via TV

Francis N. Satterlee

The Virginia Hunter Education Course will be appearing in the fall schedule of several public television stations across Virginia. The videotaped series features Game Warden Major Lewis Brandt, former host of the Game Commission's *All Outdoors* TV series. A veteran instructor, Brandt has personally trained more than 6,000 young people.

Produced at the studio of WCVE in Richmond with the assistance of Ken Collins Associates of Richmond, the course features film segments from some of the best outdoor film makers in the U.S. by special permission.

Ten half-hour shows cover the basics of safe and responsible firearms use.

Show

1. *Hunting Traditions*
2. *Hunters and Hunting*
3. *Identification and Safety*
4. *Gun Handling*
5. *Firearms and Ammunition*
6. *Shooting Technique*
7. *Primitive Weapons—Archery*
8. *Muzzle Loading*
9. *Outdoor Skills*
10. *A Hunter's Challenge*

Persons who want to take the course for credit may register in advance. A textbook and all necessary materials will be sent free to each registrant. Each registered student will receive instructions on when and where the test will be given in his locality. An instructor will conduct a review and administer the test. Consult your local public TV schedule for day and time. For further information write:

Hunter Education
P.O. Box 11104
Richmond, Virginia 23230

Harry Gillam is editor of Virginia Wildlife *magazine and chief of the Game Commission's eduction division.*

Program Schedule

Channel 23	WCVE	Richmond	5:30 P.M.	Sundays	Beginning September 6
Channel 51	WVPT	Harrisonburg	5:00 P.M.	Sundays	Beginning September 6
Channel 15	WBRA	Roanoke	Begins in October		Consult local program listings

Big Game Trophy Contest

Opinions vary greatly over what constitutes a trophy buck. Over the years, various attempts have been made to develop a system of evaluation based on a series of measurements of the antlers. The combinations of these measurements and subtractions or penalties for certain characteristics then result in a score which is meant to be indicative of the trophy value of a particular deer head. Many different scoring systems have evolved, including the "Virginia System" which has been used in the state's Big Game Trophy contest for the last 40 years with good results.

Use of this system was begun in 1940 when the Virginia Penisula Sportsman's Association assumed the sponsorship of an annual big game trophy contest, one of the oldest, if not the oldest big game championship contest in the country. Although it included the whitetail deer only at first, it began to include black bear in 1945. One year later, the Game Commission became involved in the contest. Then, in 1948, the contest used eastern and western regional finals before awarding statewide honors.

Like the system used by the Boone and Crockett Club, system, the Virginia system includes the length of each main beam and of all points and the circumference between the burr and all points. Early scoring systems consisted only of the present "typical" method. However, the impact of the Virginia scoring system, which was written up in the May 1946 issue of *Sports Afield* and the November 1946 issue of *Outdoor Life* convinced symmetry purists that this was not completely right, so they added a "non-typical" deer classification. Still, the Virginia system recognizes no such distinction, but includes more individual measurements. The outstanding trophy originating in Virginia, listed in the 1977 edition of the "North American Big Game" record book is a "non-typical" head killed by W.C. Shaefer in Powhatan County in 1970. It scored 216 3/8 under the Boone and Crockett scoring system and 251 6/8 under the Virginia System. A "typical" deer listed in the same record book, killed by Lloyd Lam in 1955 in Rockingham County, is 170 1/8 under the Boone and Crockett system and 252 3/16 under the Virginia system. The Virginia system provides a built-in bonus for a typical trophy and a penalty of one-half the total length of all random points and one-half the difference between the total score for each antler. The basic Boone and Crockett system calls for exact symmetry and penalizes the difference between each matching measurement. The Safari Club International has developed a scoring system within the past few years which is in many ways simpler than either the Boone and Crockett or Virginia systems, but does not provide for any penalties for non-symmetry or abnormalities.

The site of the statewide contest alternates between the eastern and western parts of the state. This year, the statewide contest will take place in Newport News following the eastern regional contest. Both will be held at Deer Park Elementary School on October 24; for more information, contact James S. Harvey, 126 Kerlin Road in Newport News (804/595-0026). The western regional will take place at the Rockingham County Fairgrounds in Harrisonburg on October 9 and 10; for more information contact Larry Dickenson, Rt. 10, Harrisonburg (703/434-5975).

The Virginia System: How to Measure Your Trophy

Note 1. All measurements to be in inches to the nearest eighth.

Note 2. No protuberance to be counted as a point or as a random prong unless it is at least one inch in length from tip of point to outside of main beam. If the main beam is irregular at that spot, the outside of the main beam is considered to be the projected line of the principal curve of the beam, see Detail "A." Protuberances less than an inch in length are disregarded.

Note 3. Length of points to be measured on their outside centerline from tip of point to outside centerline from tip of point at outside edge of main beam, see Detail "A," and measurements "B," "C," "D," "E," "F," "G," and "H." Points are those protuberances an inch or more in length which spring regularly and in sequence from the main beam in the typical whitetail deer antler pattern.

Note 4. Any protuberance which meets the requirement of Note 2 for length but which does not meet the Note 3 requirement of being a main pattern point shall be classed as a random prong. If there exists any doubt in the mind of the scorer as to whether or not a protuberance is a main pattern point, it shall be scored as a random prong. The length of random prongs is measured in the same manner as for points, see Note 3.

Note 5. Circumference of beam to be taken at smallest section between points, see measurements "K," "L," "M," "N," "O,"and "P." No circumference measurements to be taken between last point and tip of main beam. In taking measurements "I" and "J," all projecting prongs and protuberances on burr and main beam shall be disregarded so far as practicable.

Note 6. Measurement "Q" covers outide spread of main beams and projecting points should be ignored. However, since the antler tips are considered as part of the main beam, measurement "R" on a wide, flaring-type antler may be the same for tip to tip and for outside spread of beam.

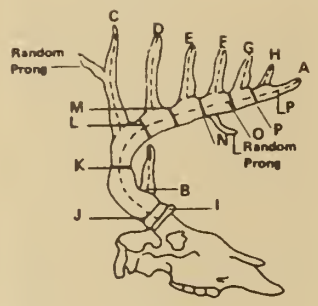
Note 7. The right antler is the antler on the right side of the deer.

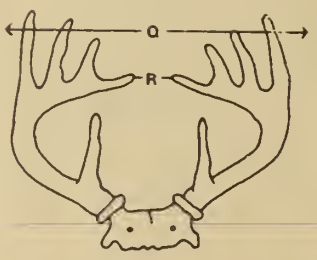
Note 8. Measurement "R," tip to tip spread, is not a scoring measurement. It is used to determine the bonus awarded to heads whose beams curve inward in the typical whitetail pattern, the reason being to protect them against competition from a freakish head whose beams flare straight out. This score is a bonus score only, and no score is entered if "R" exceeds "Q."

Note 9. Penalities are charged for non-symmetry, random prongs, and excess spread. Since random prongs are obviously less important than main pattern points of corresponding length, the random prong penalty results in such prongs being given only half-credit for their length. The excess spread penalty is a further protection against freak heads, in addition to the bonus mentioned in Note 8, and there will be no penalty assessed in this column except in the rare cases where spread exceeds the average length of the main beams.

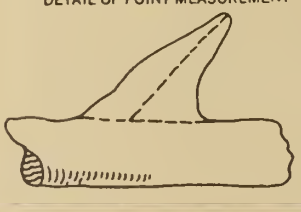
Note 10. In counting the total number of points and random prongs, each beam tip counts as a point.

See notes on preceding page. Refer to notes 2 and 3 for items A-H. For items I-P see note 5. Items Q and R are discussed in notes 2 and 6. Notes 4 and 9 refer to random prongs and penalties.





DETAIL OF POINT MEASUREMENT



How to Measure Your Trophy

		Column 1 Right	Column 2 Left	Column 3
A	Length of beam on outside curve			
B	Length of brow point			
C	Length of second points			
D	Length of third point			
E	Length of fourth point			
F	Length of fifth point			
G	Length of sixth point			
H	Length of seventh point			
I	Circumference of burr			
J	Cir. between burr and brow point			
K	Cir. between brow and second point			
L	Cir. between second and third point			
M	Cir. between third and fourth point			
N	Cir. between fourth and fifth point			
O	Cir. between fifth and sixth point			
P	Cir. between sixth and seventh point			
Q	Outside spread of main beams (see note 6)			
R	Tip to tip spread (see note 6)			
Bonus for typical antler PATTERN=Q - R (see note 2))				
	Length of first random prong			
	Length of second random prong			
	Length of third random prong			
	Length of fourth random prong			
Total number of points and random prongs				
TOTALS				

Total score=Column 1+Column 2, +Column 3			
Penalties	Non-symmetry one-half the difference of columns 1 and 2		
	Random prongs one-half the total length of all random prongs		
	Spread excess of outside spread (Q) over average beam length (A)		
Total penalties			
FINAL SCORE=TOTAL SCORE - TOTAL PENALTIES			
Owner			
Address			
Killed by			
Locality			
Date			

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Camp Safety

by Bill Anderson

Three men, bent on a few days of hunting, drove their vehicle as far as they could. When it became bogged down in the mire and muck, they decided they had no alternative except to make camp then and there, although the site wasn't their original choice.

Soon, their tent was erected and their gasoline stove emitted a satisfying warmth. At least one man added to that warmth by consuming a quantity of whiskey. Soon, two of the campers retired to their sleeping bags.

The third man went to a nearby stream for water. He returned to the tent and just as he stepped inside there was a resounding blast and the tent was literally lifted off the ground. Result: one killed, another critically burned and the third, the water carrier, substained painful burns.

Subsequent investigation revealed that a can of fuel on the tent floor had probably been spilled. Flames had reached the fuel, or vapors from the liquid had reached the flames. The tent became a fiery bomb.

This tragic incident was admittedly unusual. Generally, camping can be regarded as one of man's safest forms of recreation, whether we camp to meet another need or for the pure pleasure of camping. But as with golfing, boating or any other form of recreation, if we don't follow the rules of safety and exercise good judgement, someone is apt to get hurt.

Quite a few years back, two young men built a fire of charcoal in their tent. Later they were both found dead. The cause: carbon monoxide poisoning. In other incidents, bears have mauled campers and have occasionally killed them. But before you decide to give up camping, let me repeat: camping is one of the safest recreation activities there is.

I have camped for many years, all the way from Arizona's breath-taking Grand Canyon to Virginia's beautiful Shenandoah National Park, and I have yet to have the misfortune of seeing or being involved in a serious camping accident. The few minor accidents I have observed were caused by someone's lack of knowledge or by carelessness.

A good rule of thumb for camp safety is that many of the precautions that apply to the home apply to the campsite. Fire within a tent or metal-structured camper is usually used for smoking, heating, cooking or light. Smokers should make sure matches and smokes are dead out. They should always use ashtrays of non-flammable materials. If there is any chance of a concentration of gas or gasoline vapors, fire should be avoided, and the tent or camper should be cleared of occupants until the source can be found and the situation corrected.

Several years ago two friends and I camped four days, during which time we detected the odor of gas from time to time. We were using a gas-fueled stove and knew we had a leak, but try as we might we could find none. We were lucky. When we returned home, the owner of the gas container found a small hole in the tank. We had made two mistakes. The gas apparatus should not have been used once we realized there was a leak. Secondly, if at all possible, fuel sources should not be kept inside a tent or camper.

Not only should fuel supplies be stored outside, but appliances should be fueled away from the tent or camper. I have seen the atmosphere seemingly explode when a match was lighted outside where stove fuel or gasoline had been spilled. Outdoors this is dangerous; inside it may be disasterous.

Stoves, heaters or lanterns become very hot and can produce serious injuries if touched. Upsetting these pieces of equipment may cause a serious fire or explosion. The carrying handles on lanterns and heaters should not be left above the equipment; they become very hot. Double mantle gasoline lanterns produce something like 2000 BTU's of heat energy. I once scorched the wall of my tent by placing a lantern too close. A few more minutes and it might have caught fire.

A valve on a stove or lantern that does not completely close off the fuel flow can cause havoc. I observed a camper lighting his stove when suddenly the stove exploded into flames. Apparently gasoline had been dripping from the generator all day and the stove was saturated with the stuff.

Heaters, lanterns, stoves and all other equipment that burns, use oxygen and give off toxic fumes. These can actually consume enough oxygen out of a tight enclosure to cause death by suffocation. Manufacturers of this equipment recommend that campers make sure there is ample ventilation.

Fire outside can also be hazardous. Blowing sparks can not only touch off a forest or grass fire, but can easily blow

into tent material, causing damage or worse. Campfires should not be left unattended at any time.

Outside it may be difficult to see the flames from a camp stove or heater, so we should make sure that stove we touch is cold. The cook who knocks the fuel tank from a gasoline camp stove may find himself contending with a flame thrower. A good idea is to drop two nails or screws through the holes in the tank arms. This will secure the tank to the stove and they are easily removed when the stove cools.

Such tools as knives and axes should be safely cared for. A single-bit ax is much safer than a double-bit variety. Likewise, a sharp cutting tool presents less hazard then does a dull one. I have seen one too many dull ax blades ricochet from a wood block. I was dealt a stunning blow by such an ax, but luckily it was the backside of a single bit. Cutting tools should be kept in a safe place. Ax heads should be tight, and the user must be sure his path of swing is clear.

Small children in camp must be watched constantly. It is amazing how fast they can get lost, burned, cut, or otherwise harmed.

Ropes or clotheslines need to be strung above head height. A couple of bright streamers tied to them is a good idea. Tent pegs need to be a bright color; they can inflict a painful injury to a bare foot.

Besides being unsightly, trash can cause injury. Last year I was walking on a leaf-covered trail when I heard a crunch beneath my foot. Upon examination I found I had stepped on a bottle hidden by fallen leaves. The glass had carved a four-inch gash half-way through my boot's heavy sole. I shudder to think what would have happened had I been barefoot or wearing thin-soled shoes. In the same area, a child sustained a painful cut when she stepped on a crushed soft drink bottle.

Guns in a hunting camp should never be kept loaded. Last year in Virginia, 27 hunting accidents involving firearms occurred at less than 10 yards' distance from the shooter to the victim. How many of these were in or near camp I do not know, but there is a great likelihood that the person you accidentally shoot, or who shoots you, will be someone you know, and at close range. Of course, several of these close-range accidents are self-inflicted. So while in camp, keep your firearm unloaded and don't point it at anyone, including yourself. Often I have seen outdoorsmen swing the muzzle of their gun past someone else to change directions. Wouldn't it be just as easy to point it up or down while making your move?

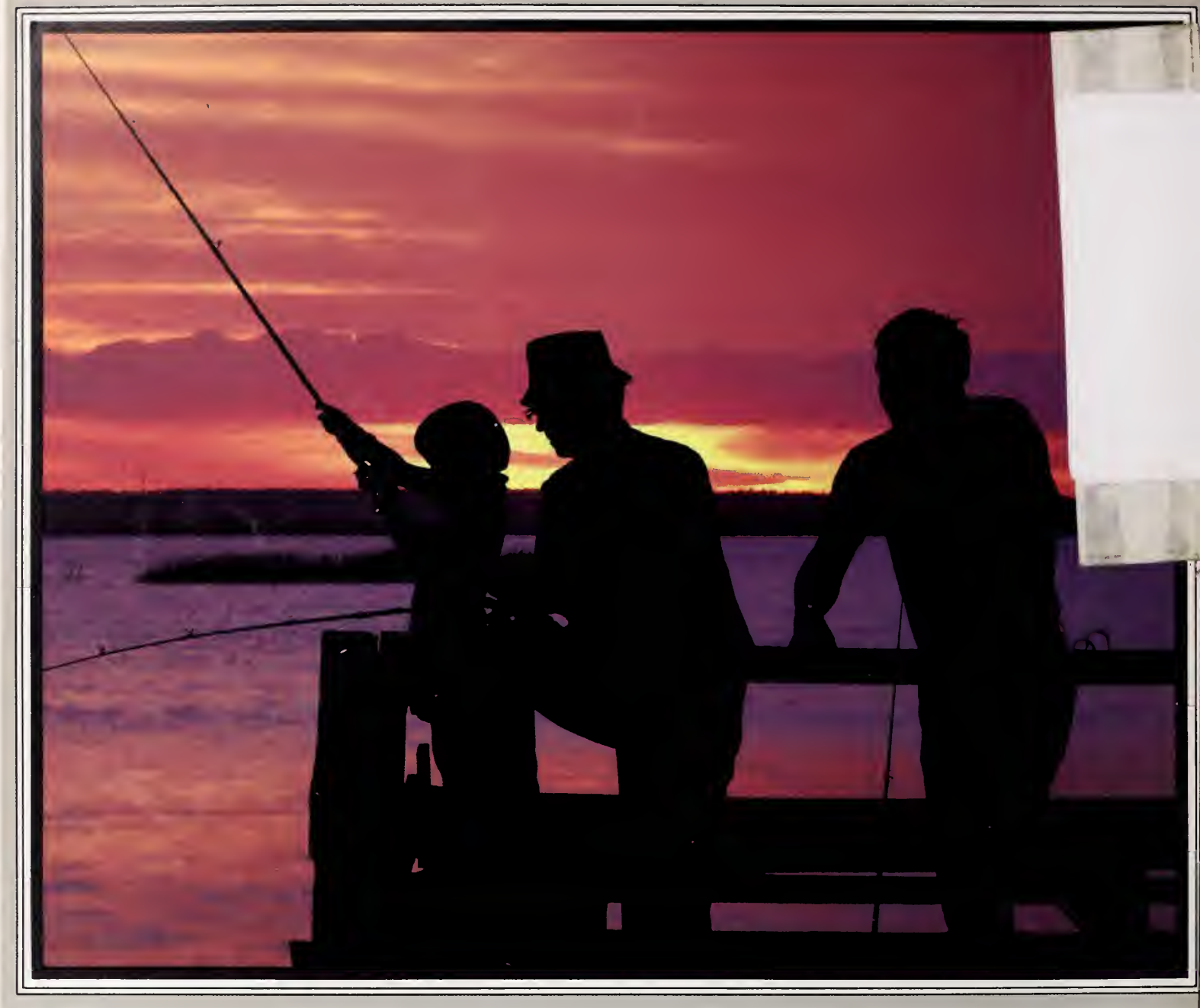
Wild animals almost never bother campers if treated with respect. In fact, many people complain because of the absence of nature's creatures. However, the fact that animals can be dangerous under certain circumstances should not be ignored. A family which camped near us in Shenandoah National Park had an unpleasant encounter with a bear about two year ago. Their cooler, chock-full of food, had been stashed in a shaded spot close to their tent and, said they, a bear would not venture so close to humans.

These folks received the surprise of their life when late one night they were awakened by a loud clamor. A large bear was ripping at their cooler in an effort to open it. He finally succeeded in demolishing it and getting at the food. The "man of the house" came charging angrily out of his tent, shouting and yelling at the hungry animal. For an instant the huge bear turned on the creature that had disturbed his midnight feast, but in the end he gave way and retreated into the darkness.

Never, when camping in bear country, leave food where animals can reach it. Lock it in your vehicle. Do not eat inside or allow any food to be brought into your tent. Do not tease or torment bears; always give them a wide berth. Many times bears have walked within a few feet of our tent, sniffing and snuffing in their search for tidbits of food. I have never known of a black bear (Virginia's only bear species) injuring a camper who treated the powerful beasts with respect.

Would-be campers should become thoroughly familiar with all their equipment. The backyard is the best spot for that first weekend camping trip. It is pathetic, to say the least, to see a camper attempting to use unfamiliar equipment. While camping at Big Tumbling Creek, another camper shyly approached me and asked if I knew anything about camp stoves. I reached for my tool box while admitting I had tinkered with the things a few times. I asked what the problem seemed to be.

"There's nothing wrong with the stove," he replied. "I just don't know how to turn the darned thing off." □



National Hunting and Fishing Day
" A Day for Years to Come"

September 26, 1981